

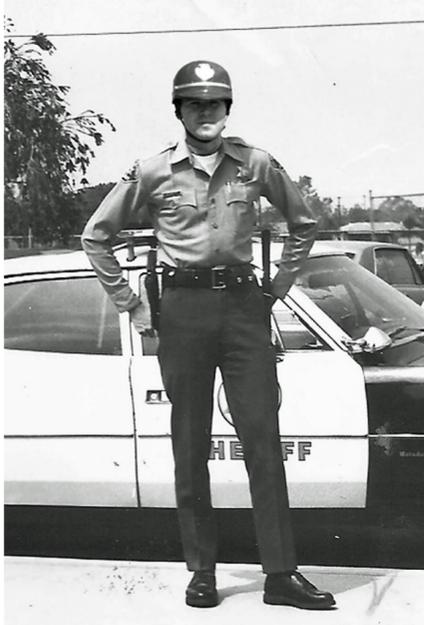
Party 1 – Airplane

Party 2 – Radio Car

By Deputy Chris Miller (retired)

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In the late 1960's, planes parked at Compton Airport were being broken into and their avionic radios were being stolen. This continued to be a problem until a contract with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department provided night-time security. Two deputies were hired on overtime from Firestone Sheriff's Station to provide security and were positioned in unmarked detective cars at each end of the airport so they could keep an eye on the aircraft and prevent any further thefts.



Deputy Paul Alexander

In 1969 Deputy Paul Alexander was sitting in a dark blue detective car in a darkened area at one end of the airport so he could watch the planes without being seen. Deputy Alexander had been watching a biplane which was practicing taking off and landing when he noticed a bright light in the western sky which later turned out to be a rocket launched from Vandenberg Air Force Base. At first he thought the bright light was from the biplane but then he realized it wasn't. As Alexander was focused on the bright light, he hadn't noticed that the biplane had landed and was taxiing to a hangar. The pilot wasn't paying attention and didn't notice the dark colored undercover car parked in the unlit area.

As Deputy Alexander sat in his car watching the bright light, the biplane approached his vehicle from the rear. Since the windows were rolled up, Alexander didn't hear the roar of an engine until it was directly behind him. He glanced into the rearview mirror to see the biplane approaching. The pilot didn't see the car that was directly in front of him and continued forward. All of a sudden the plane's propeller made contact with the trunk of the car. The deputy watched in horror as the propeller slashed into the trunk. With each rotation the prop blades cut through the top of the trunk. The momentum from the rapidly striking propeller blades caused the car to bounce uncontrollably up and down as if it had hydraulic lifts and even though the windows were rolled up, the noise inside the vehicle was deafening. The blades from the propeller destroyed and ripped out the radio components that were mounted in the trunk.

Alexander's first reaction was to grab the microphone and broadcast that a plane had crashed into his car, but since the radio components had now been completely destroyed, the radio didn't work. Eventually Alexander was able to escape from the mangled vehicle, check on the condition of the pilot and assess the damage. The pilot, though unhurt, was understandably upset about the damage to his very expensive aircraft and although apologetic, wanted to know why the deputy had parked his car in such a dark area.

When Alexander's sergeant arrived he was astounded; he couldn't believe that a plane had crashed into a radio car. He said he had never seen an "Auto vs Airplane" in his entire career. He had also never seen "Pilot Number One" and "Driver Number Two" listed on a collision report.

Fellow deputies joked with Alexander, suggesting he put a decal of a biplane on the side of his radio car. They also said that he was the only ace at Firestone Station and referred to him as the Red Baron.

Over the years, Deputy Alexander has heard many versions of his story, some creatively altered. One story had him racing down the runway as a plane came in for a landing and crashed into him. In another version, which was completely untrue, said that he had been drinking and was asleep in the radio car.

This experience, however, did not put him off and in the 1970's Alexander went on to become a small plane pilot. After retiring from the Sheriff's Department he continued to fly and in all the years of flying he has never had a serious mishap, nor has he ever crashed into a car.

A Moment in History

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Poster designed by Lieutenant Dan Waidner (Retired)