

From "Swept Under the Rug" website:

Oklahoma City, April 9, 1922

Post Field army aviation officers paid a last tribute of love and respect to their former commandant late this afternoon, when four airplanes aloft in the sky cast a burden of roses to the winds, showering with flowers the eastbound train which was taking the body of Lt. Col. Paul Ward Beck, beloved soldier of the air service, to Arlington National Cemetery for burial.

Not a 21-gun salute, no boots backwards in the stirrups. Instead, US Army planes flying low to shower the train bearing his casket with roses. Paul W. Beck, a pioneering military aviator, did not have an ordinary death. Or, for that matter, an ordinary life.



Paul Beck was an Army brat, born in 1876 at a Fort McKavett in Texas, and raised throughout the West at the quarters of the Tenth Cavalry where his father was an officer with the Buffalo Soldiers. His father had also been an Indian agent in Nebraska.

The youngest of four, Paul joined the "family business", enlisting for an army career. At the time of his death, Col. Beck was second-in-command at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, where Geronimo was held until his death in 1909.

(And where Prescott Bush & other Skull & Bones secret society members from Yale are reputed to have grave-robbed his bones from.)

Beck was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant in 1899, and saw combat in the Philippines during the Spanish American war. Before long, he became interested in aviation, which is what he was best known for.



- Dropped sand bags on a Los Angeles Air Show to demonstrate the feasibility of dropping bombs from the air, January 1910
- Sent the first radio transmission from an airplane, January 1911
- Pioneered aerial border reconnaissance in Texas along the Rio Grande, Spring 1911
- 1911 appointed an instructor for Army pilots
- Instrumental in setting up a separate Aeronautical Division in the Army Signal Corps, and first unit commander in April 1911, which eventually became the US Air Force
- Piloted the the first flight to carry US Mail, September 1911; the Postmaster General was his passenger



Postmaster General Hitchcock hands Capt. Paul Beck the first bag of air mail, Nassau Boulevard airdrome Sept. 29, 1911.

Col. Beck's wife, Ruth Everett, was an accomplished woman in her own right, having published stories and books, fiction, about Native Americans. Her skills perhaps contributed to his reputation as a good writer, having published numerous articles himself. She was born in Nebraska, the daughter of settlers born in Maine & New York, a college graduate raised on a farm. Here she is shown with other early military aviators:



Mrs. Beck, Ellyson, Robinson.
March 6, 1911.

Via his and her passport applications, I learned that Beck (rank then Major) served as military attaché to the American Embassy in Havana, Cuba at least from January to October 1919. He had previously served abroad in the Philippines and in Columbia as well. In July 1921, he was made assistant post commander at Henry Post Field, Fort Sill, Oklahoma, the fourth highest ranking officer in the army's air service. His wife died a few weeks later, August 1921. By this time, his son Paul Jr. had embarked on his own military career.

Col. Beck had made well-placed friends, including retired Oklahoma State Supreme Court Justice and oil millionaire, Jean B. Day, and his wife Aubie. Early April, he flew into Oklahoma City to visit them. In the wee hours of the morning, the judge shot him dead. Shot him in the head, in his own house, where he was a guest. There's a lot of versions of the story emerged at the time.

Slain Aviator and Man Who Shot Him



Lieut. Col. Paul Ward Beck, pioneer aviator stationed at Post Field, Oklahoma City, was shot and killed following a bridge party in the home of Judge Jean P. Day, Oklahoma financier and former member of the Okla-

homa Supreme Court Commission. Beck was prominent socially in Washington, D. C. Judge Day was exonerated by a woman's jury when he testified that Beck was shot after an attack on Mes. Day.

The reporting was all over the place on this one, with reluctance to vilifying or punishing Judge Day and also to besmirching the reputation of Col. Beck. This report said it was a bridge party, which sounds respectable enough. Other versions said all three were scheduled to go

to the theater, but Judge Day bowed out in favor of a political or business meeting, so Mrs. Day and Beck attended the theater without him. After the show, several people gathered to play music on a victrola and dance. There was [apparently booze](#) found by the police after the shooting, this being the Prohibition era, but no charges came of that.

Whatever else is true, the shooting definitely occurred in the [wee hours of the morning](#), rather late for a respectable game of bridge. Beck & Mrs. Day were alone in the house, and the only point of real dispute, ultimately, was whether there was an attempted rape or a more consensual act underway. In testimony before various panels, Mrs. Beck [claimed she fainted](#) or otherwise was unable to recall what happened.

Jean Day, after all, had been a State Supreme Court Judge and was an oil millionaire. Hardly the kind of guy one could expect to send to prison with common *criminals*. Or something. At any rate, the version of the story of a sexual assault carried enough sway that Judge Day was [cleared by a coroner's jury](#). No charges were entered against him.

But it wasn't a clean process. A man was charged with [blackmail](#), claiming to have witnessed what *really* occurred through open curtains. Insinuations of a [history of impropriety](#) by Beck surfaced. Some months later, Judge Day's attorney even claimed, contrary to all reports at the time, that Beck was [never even invited](#) to the Day's home.

The Army didn't let this finding stand unchallenged. There was nothing they could do to bring Beck back to life, but they did what they could to salvage his reputation. They ruled Paul Beck's death to have occurred in the line of duty, and he was buried with full military honors. With [blood red roses](#) strewn from Army planes on the train bearing his casket.

GRIEF WITH HIS WIVES IS THE CHAP'S SPECIALTY

Fort Worth, Texas, Oct. 15.—J. P. Day, former Oklahoma supreme court judge once acquitted in 1929 of the slaying of Lieut. Col. Paul Ward Beck, when he found the latter embracing his wife, has been sued for divorce by a second wife.

Day was divorced by his first wife after the slaying. A jury found that the judge killed his army officer while protecting his home and his wife's honor.

Mrs. Helen Day, wife No. 2, alleges cruel treatment in her divorce petition. Her husband today was enjoined from molesting her or from gaining custody of their 6-year-old son, pending trial of the suit.

I found myself wondering about the condition of the Days' marriage after this violent scandal. Then I found the clipping (right) showing that not only had wife #1 divorced him after the shooting, but wife #2 sued for divorce on grounds of cruelty. (Not only that, he'd moved to Texas!)

An unresolved angle on the story, from a news report about the coroner's inquest:

[Oklahoma City, April 8, 1922](#)

It is to refute this [Judge Day's] story, the airmen who served under Beck's command at Fort Sill's aviation field, have come to the inquest.

They are headed by Beck's son and nephew, Lieut. John W. Beck, whose father - Colonel Beck's brother - was slain under mysterious circumstances several days ago.

I could find nothing about the brother's death at all, neither around that time nor at any other time. No death record at all for either of Colonel Beck's brothers, William and John. Perhaps that mysterious death was

misreported; it wouldn't have been the only problem in reporting of this story.

So far as I can tell, Lieut. Paul Beck, Jr. was the Colonel's only child. He did not stay in the army, being honorably discharged in 1927, Fayetteville, NC. After that, he spent about a year in a Tennessee home for disabled volunteer soldiers, 1928-9. In the 1930 Census, he's a farmer in Sturgis, South Dakota, living with his mother's brother. I found a death record, San Antonio in 1966, but nothing in the 1940 Census and no record of a family of his own. And so, there's likely no offspring to remember and pass along the story of Colonel Paul Ward Beck's extraordinary life with its tragic end.