

In Memoriam: William John Tonkin Jr.



WILLIAM JOHN Tonkin Jr., president of Tonkin's Orchids, Inc., died at home February 11, 1993 at age 72 after dedicating his retirement years to hybridizing and propagating paphiopedilums. Creator of scores of superb orchid hybrids, he is remembered primarily for popularizing *Paphiopedilum rothschildianum* and its hybrids.

Known to his friends as Jack, he is survived by Valerie Tonkin, his wife of 51 years and an active partner in their world-renowned orchid business.

Born in Oakland, California, Jack graduated from the University of California at Berkeley in 1942, with a degree in business administration.

He enlisted in the Navy, served three years in the South Pacific during World War II and was mustered out as a Lieutenant Commander. Returning to the San Francisco area, he joined the University of California at Berkeley's engineering department research division where he worked until retiring in 1983.

Jack's interest in cultivating orchids began in the 1950s when he and Valerie began growing orchids as a hobby on the windowsill of their home in Kensington, California. After building a small greenhouse in their back yard, he soon became interested in hybridizing orchids. Eventually he rented commercial-size greenhouses, and began to pursue the hobby professionally, working evenings and weekends to realize his dreams. After incorporating their business, the Tonkins joined with two other growers to form The Orchid Ranch. Each member of this unique combine of orchid firms operates individually, growing different orchid genera on the same property.

While Jack enjoyed fishing, hunting and photography, there is little doubt that his main interest was the breeding and growing of a premier *Paphiopedilum* collection. He was an active judge of the American Orchid Society (AOS), past president of the Orchid Society of California, treasurer of the Commercial Orchid Growers Guild and an active participant in the Paphiopedilum Guild.

The Tonkins' *Paphiopedilum* collection has won 222 awards since 1981. Clones of *Paphiopedilum rothschildianum* garnered 25 awards from the AOS and two from the Cymbidium Society of America. Jack knew, as few, if any, have known, the satisfaction of winning nine First Class Certificate awards from the AOS. He also won the prestigious hybridizers AOS Award of Quality for *Paphiopedilum* Iantha Stage (*sukhakulii* x *rothschildianum*) and *Paphiopedilum* Valerie Tonkin (Hellas x Stefani Pitta).

Orchidists everywhere benefited from Jack Tonkin's contributions to developing the finest in quality paphiopedilums. He created a foundation of hybrids on which future generations may be built. — Frank Fordyce, *The Orchid Ranch, 1330 Isabel Avenue, Livermore, California 94550.*