

# ADVENTURE

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ADVENTURE

# CAMPFIRE

**U**NDERSTANDABLY intrigued by Virgil Burford's account of the salmon-poaching in Alaska ("I Was a Fish Pirate," page 24), we got off a short note to Walt Morey, the writer to whom Burford told the story. Who is Virgil Burford? we asked. And what has he done besides poach salmon?

This is the memorandum we got back:

"1. Virgil Burford is an adventurer.  
2. He has done damned near everything.

"Mr. Burford's life of adventure began when he ran away from home as a kid and hit the open road. He has been a prize-fighter. He has been a carnival boxer and wrestler, taking on all comers. He has been a pile-buck and construction stiff. He has prospected for gold.

"For the past dozen years he has been adventuring in Alaska. There he has been a big-game hunter, fisherman, construction worker and deep-sea diver.

"He has seen Alaska by air, with the bush pilots, and tramped over hundreds of miles of that rugged land. He has seen Alaskan seas from the cabin of a 30-foot boat which he operated alone in some of the worst weather the North can throw at a man. He has seen the bottoms of those same seas, searching for sunken ships and treasure.

"Fish pirating, like shooting a giant Kodiak bear or diving for the first time, was a thing he tried just for thrills.

"In summation, I can say from experience that in fun or a fight, Burford is a fine man to have on your side."

We are filing the information away, in case we should run into fun or a fight.

**T**HE moment of decision for Jacob Hay came, he says, when he was barely six years old. "My hopes of ever earning a sensible living vanished shortly after my entrance into the public schools of York, Pennsylvania. My teachers and I discovered simultaneously that I was constitutionally incapable of adding two and two. I never made it to subtraction.

"I decided to be a newspaperman." In 1941, clutching a diploma from Penn State, Hay started out to set the publishing world afire, but he never quite made it. As an ROTC second lieutenant, he was needed elsewhere.

After the war he spent a term at Oxford, wandered back home and launched himself into journalism again. Came the Korean War and another demand for Reserve officers, and Hay spent 17 more months wearing out shoes.

His story, "The Breakout" (page 18), he says, is the result of some news photos of returning Allied prisoners in Korea—before and after their first shaves.

"I was struck," he says, "by the amaz-

ing change in their appearance, and that's about it. That, and some long bull sessions with friends who had spent time in German prison camps in the last war."

**F**RANK Harvey is a reformed advertising man. The life he escaped, he says, consisted mostly of drinking three dry martinis for lunch, and spending whole days deciding whether to change a comma into a semicolon.

From this he went into the life of a freelance writer.

A graduate of Columbia University,



Harvey doctors engine of own plane.

Frank spent six years in the advertising department of Bethlehem Steel, put in three years as a Navy Air Force lieutenant, directed publicity for Daytona Beach, and spent another five years in advertising.

His assignments as a magazine writer have taken him from Fort Worth to Istanbul, and he has traveled in everything from his own Piper Super Cub to a jet bomber. A demon for on-the-spot reporting, he has risked his life countless times in such activities as flying through hurricanes, riding over the Caucasus Mountains with the Turkish cavalry and driving an automobile in the London fog.

He has done stories on practically every new airplane the Air Force flies. His story on a crop-duster pilot ("Death Is His Copilot") appears on page 10.

**E**VAN Hunter says that the idea for his story "The Intruders" (page 22), has been churning about in his mind ever since the days when he was a student at Hunter College in New York.

"I was living in the Bronx then," he says, "and commuting between there and school on the Lexington Avenue subway. One night I was going down the platform on 68th Street when I saw a man very much like the hero of my story.

"He was not young. He was short, and he was fat—unlike my hero. He looked tired. It was late at night, and I thought there might be danger for him on a subway platform, so I went to him and took his arm and asked if I might help.

"He swung his arm at me and shouted, 'Leave me alone! Leave me alone!'

"I left him alone, but I've never forgotten the sound of his voice or the tortured personality that must have produced that outburst. I carried the idea for a long time, and finally pitted a younger version of that man against a menace to society.

"The result is 'The Intruders.'"

**I**F IT were true that a rolling stone gathers no moss, Colonel E. A. Powell would probably be the baldest boulder in the whole neighborhood.

Colonel Powell, whose "Yankee Nabob" begins on page 34, describes himself as a professional onlooker, but in the course of onlooking he has racked up a considerable amount of mileage, covering most of the globe and striking up acquaintances with any number of kings, presidents, and dictators.

As a roving correspondent for American and English magazines, he has traveled by caravan and car across the Middle East from Arabia to Iran, by safari and river boat across Africa from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic, by elephant across the Himalayas to Nepal, on horseback through the interior of Ethiopia, and by plane across the Pacific, southeastern Asia, India, Persia and Russia. He has been an officer of the United States Foreign Service in Asiatic Turkey and Egypt, and a special representative of the Department of Agriculture in Central Asia. During World War I he covered the Belgian, French, British, Italian and German armies as a correspondent for the *New York World*, the *Chicago Tribune* and the *London Daily Mail*, and later became an officer in the American Expeditionary Forces. In World War II he was political editor of the Office of Censorship and an official of the Foreign Economic Administration.

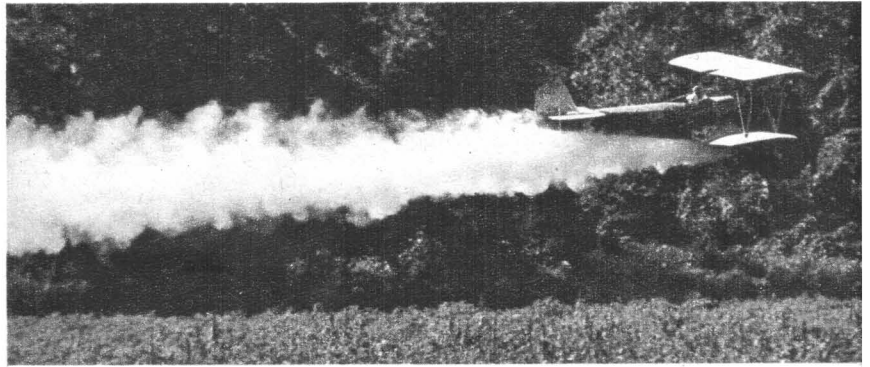
To fill in his idle time, Colonel Powell has written 32 books and several hundred magazine articles.

Nowadays he usually spends his winters in the tropics and the rest of the year at home in the Connecticut Berkshires. Since an almost-fatal accident three years ago, he's been trying hard to take it easy. ■ ■



ADVENTURE • APRIL 1954

Bruggeman pours bug dust into hopper. Dust is poison, could kill him—and bugs.



# Death Is His Copilot

by Frank Harvey

Skimming treetops and high-tension lines is all in a day's work for Bob Bruggeman, crop duster. The pay isn't bad—but he's never really sure he'll be around to collect it

PHOTOS BY HOMER PAGE

**S**HORTLY after V-J Day, the Stearman Yellow Peril, a sturdy biplane dear to the hearts of Army and Navy air cadets, was tossed on the war-surplus market in volume. This aircraft had been designed with student pilots in mind. Short of diving into the ground wide open (and some cadets had even managed to walk away from *that*), the aircraft was practically indestructible. It had no red line on the airspeed indicator. You could climb it as high as it would go, seven or eight thousand feet, stand it on the nose and let her rip. When the treetops appeared about to come through the windshield, you could brace your feet on the instrument panel, seize the stick in both hands, and heave ho! The Peril would come out on a dime, pulling God knows how many Gs, and black you out like midnight. Nothing else would happen. The wings wouldn't even quiver.

Naturally, this rough-and-tumble flying machine was bound to find favor among the thousands of ex-GIs seeking fame and fortune as crop dusters. If you were extra lucky, you might pick up a slightly used Peril for around \$800.

For another five bills you could stick a big, stainless tank into it, connect the tank to nozzles or a hopper venturi, and you had yourself a dream job. Afternoons you put on a one-man airshow in some farmer's potato pasture while his beautiful daughter fluttered her hankie coyly from the back porch. Evenings, you and self-same daughter toiled around the neighborhood in a glittering new Cadillac which you picked up out of earnings. After a few years of this sort of thing, you had it made, and could retire to a life of ease—or so the surplus-plane salesman would assure you. . . .

However, before anyone drops this magazine and dashes out to comb the surplus market for a second-hand Stearman, there are a certain few facts that should be made known. First, it is almost impossible to get a good Stearman these days without paying a large chunk of money for it. Secondly, crop dusting is hard, nerve-racking work, and the accident record is appalling.

Back in 1950, for example, when some 5,000 pilots logged around half a million hours anointing American real estate from the air, there were 439 reported accidents.

This is what the dusters call "Painting." Each bug practically gets an individual dose.



**BIRD CAGES:** short, narrow fields surrounded by tall trees, call for steep dive, flat run and quick pull-out.

### DEATH IS HIS COPILOT CONTINUED

Two hundred and sixteen pilots accidentally whanged into power lines, poles, trees, rocks and other unyielding objects. Fifty-three got careless and stalled into the ground. The rest managed to butch it up in various ingenious ways, and when the smoke and dust cleared, hundreds were badly abraded, 40 were seriously hurt, *44 were dead*. A large insurance company which specializes in writing aviation policies, simply threw away the tables and announced they wouldn't cover an agricultural flying machine for any price. The pilot, yes—if the guy could afford 10 times the normal rate. Duster pilots, short on money and long on dare-deviltry, told the insurance company to go to hell, climbed into the cockpit, and went about their business.

Dangerous or not, crop dusting is destined to be a major factor in American agriculture and forestry for the simple reason that it's the fastest, cheapest (often the only) way that bugs can be killed before they eat up all the green stuff in the neighborhood. To cite just one isolated example: the mighty Douglas fir forests of Oregon, Washington and Canada would eventually be completely killed by voracious spruce budworms, if fleets of converted Yellow Perils did not frizzle these "little stomachs" by the zillions with a periodic spraying of DDT. Roughly 50,000,000 U.S. acres will be

seeded, weeded, dusted, sprayed, fertilized, pollenized and otherwise treated from the air in 1953—and that's Big Business.

ADVENTURE Magazine sent me out to locate a top-flight duster pilot and find out what makes him tick: what are his expenses, hazards, skills, and profits. Six-foot, 200-pound Robert Frederic Bruggeman, of Fort Pierce, Florida (in winter) and Nyack, New York, (in summer) was recommended to me by his most critical audience—the New Jersey truck farmers who pay him five cents an acre to sprinkle bug dust on their radishes. They'd tried various pilots, they said, and had settled on Bob—as long as he lasted. The way this madman leapfrogged over treetops, ducked under powerlines and came back trailing corn silk in his landing gear, nobody could be quite sure if he'd return flying or being carried. As Louis Morgan, a big cabbage king, put it: "Bruggeman is our boy because he paints it on." Painting it on, in the trade lingo, means that Bob swoops down to within grabbing distance of the plants and practically lays the dust on each individual bug with a spoon.

"There's no use trying to kid a farmer," says Bob. "You either get the dust on his bugs or you don't. If you miss a row, that row soon looks as if guys had been wandering up

and down blasting it with buckshot—and the farmer loves to lead you out by the hand and point out the damage!”

“Don’t you ever *worry*?” I said.

“If I worried,” said Bob, “I’d be in some other business. I’d be lying on my back in a pool of paint under a Ford assembly line, the way I did before the war. I figure a guy shouldn’t expect to live forever, and if I gotta go, I’d just as soon go quick as rot to pieces in some damned plant.” Bob grinned, and you couldn’t miss the confidence in his face—a casual, relaxed kind of confidence which is acquired only one way, through years of experience. “Hell, man,” Bob chuckled. “I’m not scared. I’ll make it.”

#### The Boy Who Can Make It

If anybody is going to make it in this dangerous wire-skimming racket, Bruggeman looks like a bet. He’s a big, Lindberg-type guy, rangy, slightly stooped from crouching in the cockpit behind the stubby wind screen, strong as a weight-lifter from heaving 100-pound sacks of poison into the hopper, and cool as an icicle in the clutches. He really likes to fly. Flying has now become as automatic as breathing. He finds he can devote most of his attention to laying the dust in the right places. He’s not superstitious, but realizes that luck does enter his business, just as it enters less hazardous occupations. Last summer, for example, he took off from the little, 1,400-foot strip he’d bulldozed out a few miles from his Nyack summer cottage. The homemade wind sock, stitched by his ex-Powers model wife, Joan, hung limp as the proverbial rag in the tree-lined pocket, so Bob assumed no wind was stirring. He found out how wrong he was when the 24-year-old *Commandaire* biplane, loaded to the gunwales with dust and gasoline, staggered up to the treetops. There *was* a wind aloft. It was on Bob’s tail. To give him lift, it should have been on his nose. The tired old *Commandaire* sank wearily into the foliage, prop screaming like a lovesick banshee, and sliced a circular tunnel for a quarter-mile through leaves and twigs. Then, miraculously still flying, it emerged from the copse. Bob dipped the nose to pick up speed and went on.

“Lucked out on that one,” Bob said. “All I needed was a medium-sized limb—just one—and they’d have picked me out of the wreckage with eyebrow tweezers.”

He wasn’t so lucky a few months later, however, when he left the *Commandaire* on the strip with 20 sacks of cooper dust, already opened, under the wing to protect against possible rain in the night. Along toward morning, the phone jangled at his bedside and a voice said, “Hello, are you Bruggeman, the crop duster?”

Bob said he was.

“Well, I thought I better call you. Your airplane is out here on the field burning up.”

Having been the victim of countless similar hoaxes inflicted by fellow pilots (who have a deplorable sense of humor), Bob felt sure he was dealing with a certain prankster from Great Meadows, New Jersey.

“Fine, fine,” he cheerfully replied. “I’m glad to be rid of the old wreck. Must make a beautiful sight.”

Whereupon he hung up and went back to sleep. However, when he and Joan arrived at the strip after breakfast, they found that the phone call hadn’t been a joke. The 20 sacks of expensive copper dust were gone. The *Commandaire’s* wings were gone. All that was left was a blackened bird cage of fuselage, a slightly melted motor, and a lipsticked cigarette butt lying beside some telltale tire marks in the earth.

Joan promptly burst into tears. The ancient biplane, which she and Bob had painted a sickly aluminum-yellow, (they ran out of aluminum and had to piece it out with yellow) had carried much nostalgic lore penciled on the wings and fuselage: names and addresses of friends and customers, notes on dust sources, directions on how to reach little, obscure fields in Georgia. The old *Commandaire*, with its multi-layered coating of last year’s poison dusts, motor glistening with oil leaks, and ripped fabric neatly patched with adhesive tape, had been like a member of the family.

“I’d like to get my hands on the babe that tossed that cigarette butt,” Joan said. “You’d think people could pitch their woo in the parlor instead of coming out to somebody’s airfield and throwing lighted butts on innocent airplanes.”

Bob, who is a philosopher, chuckled. “I keep remembering that guy who called me on the phone,” he said. “I keep wondering what he thought when I told him I was glad to be rid of my plane. How light-hearted can an owner get?”

This year, Bruggeman has a new plane (new to him, that is), a fifth-hand Yellow Peril with many an honorable hour logged in the DDT wars. I wanted to get a play-by-play description of how a duster operates—takes orders, spreads his dust, collects his bills—so Joan and Bob took me along on a typical business trip into the rich, black bottom land of northwest New Jersey, a truck gardener’s paradise known as Great Meadows. Once an ancient lake bottom, Great Meadows was now clothed with tender green beds of radishes, escarolle, scallions, celery and cabbage. Bare-footed men and girls waved at Bob’s cream-colored convertible as we drove along, Bob being a minor hero in these parts. Hiring him is one way a Great Meadows farmer keeps up with the Joneses. It’s like sponsoring your own private airshow and having your beetles eliminated in the bargain.

#### A Bellowing Customer

Presently we drove into the barnyard of a prosperous farm where a handsome young giant with bulging biceps was banging on a piece of iron with a sledge hammer, wielding it with one hand like a small boy driving tacks. At the sight of the Bruggeman convertible, the giant tossed the sledge aside and lumbered over.

“Hello, sugar,” he bellowed into Joan’s ear. “Where has old lazy been sleeping lately?”

“I’ve been pretty busy,” Bob said. “I stopped in to see if you need any dusting done.”

“If I had any dusting, would I call you?” the giant shouted genially. “Think I am—crazy?”

“Sure,” Bob said. “Everybody knows you’re crazy. Tell me the honest truth. When was the last time you spent a nickel?”

“Spent a nickel?” roared the fellow, obviously highly pleased with the repartee. “Show you how I spend nickels. Want all my stuff dusted. Paint it on!”

“Fine,” Bob murmured. “I’ll be here in the morning.”

He backed quickly out of the barnyard.

“Good old Steve,” he said. “He’s one of my best customers.”

“Good old Steve,” Joan said, “just ruptured my right eardrum.”

Bob admitted that Steve was loud, but pointed out that he paid his bills on the button, making collections a pleasure. Collections, Bob said, were what he hated most. They’d tried Joan on collections in Florida, but it had not worked out too well. One day she’d made the mistake of going directly from a beach party, still in her bathing suit, (*Continued on page 44*)

## DEATH IS HIS COPILOT

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

and had barely escaped from a glassy-eyed man of the soil who chased her around the car three times before she popped in and ramrodded it out of there. Bob now does the job himself. He charges five cents a pound for dust-applying and a top day would see him putting 40 pounds of dust per acre on 40 acres of crops in the Jersey area, which comes to \$80 gross. Would-be dusters shouldn't count on anything like this, however, day-in, day-out. In some parts of Oklahoma, the going rate is a mere 15 cents an acre. To be assured of a thoroughly effective job, the dust must be applied when the air is calm.

Driving back to the Budd Lake Airport, where Bob keeps his plane while working in the Jersey area, I got a quick picture of the various dusts used to kill insects and blight. Besides keeping books, making collections, selling new clients and risking his life daily, Bruggeman must be an amateur entomologist. If he puts on too little, too late, the bugs reel around in circles, catch their balance and go back to their munching. Special compounds are needed for different types of insects. DDT, for example, will murder cabbage worms, leafhoppers, and corn-borers, but Mexican beetles and turnip aphids simply shrug the stuff off.

"How about people?" I said. "What is the most dangerous dust you handle?"

"Parathion," Bob said. "It makes you see double and feel as if you were mulling over a lungful of razorblades each time you take a breath. If you get a little too much, you double up with cramps. A little more and they bury you."

Bruggeman said he'd gotten an overdose of Parathion one morning and seen two separate and distinct wind-socks when he came back to land. A few minutes later he'd doubled up with ab-

dominal pains and been rushed to the hospital where it was assumed he had an emergency appendix. The surgeon, while scrubbing up for the operation, discovered Bob was a duster pilot and sent him wrathfully back to his room. "What you need," the doc snapped, "is a respirator—not a surgeon."

"I just hope Bob never has to use Aldrin," Joan said. "It's supposed to be so deadly that three one-hundred-thousandths of an ounce will kill a full-grown quail. When I see him come in with his face coated with dust, I hate to think what his lungs look like."

Wires, not poison dust, are Bruggeman's personal nightmare. Wires aren't like trees. They sneak up on you. Not long ago, while dusting a celery bed in Jersey, Bob got a little careless and forgot about the big droopy loop of copper cable that festooned one corner of the field. Suddenly he spotted the black loop rushing into his face. Too low to jump over, he ducked under, missing the deadly cable by a few feet.

"I felt pretty good about it," he says, "until I presented my bill to the farmer. The farmer handed me a bill of his own for twenty dollars. I'd gone so low to miss the wires, I'd chewed out two rows of his celery with my prop."

The classic story of wires, however, comes from a duster pilot named Gurney Warnberg who was spraying cotton for leaf worm in formation with another Stearman operated by a chap named Smokey Logg. Smokey cut it too fine, clipped a big power line, and cartwheeled into the tall cotton with the cables wrapped around his fuselage like a Christmas package. Warnberg immediately set his plane down a few feet from the wreck to make a quick rescue if the plane started burning.

Smokey Logg, miraculously, was sitting in his cockpit without a scratch on him. His face was paper white.

"Don't touch this plane," he whispered to Warnberg through trembling lips. "She's electrified. I'm scared to move for fear I'll be electrocuted."

Warnberg then noticed that the wires from the power lines had been completely severed and that there was not a milliamp of juice coming through the cables which were wrapped around the Stearman's cockpit. Being a lover of practical jokes, Warnberg shouted, "Don't move, Smokey! I'll go for help!"

"How long will it take?" croaked the victim. "Get me out of here, for heaven's sake, before I touch something!"

"I figure about five or six hours," Warnberg said.

"You bastard!" roared Smokey Logg. "You're gonna leave me here to die?"

"You won't die," Warnberg said. "Provided you sit perfectly still and don't move a muscle." Then he got to laughing, in spite of himself, and told Logg about the wires being severed and the plane not being hot at all. Logg is reported to have used all the swear words commonly known in the state of Oklahoma, and to have invented a number of new ones.

Actually, Yellow Perils have done some astounding things in the wire-ripping department, particularly when equipped with a transplanted 450-horsepower, Pratt-and-Whitney Wasp engine from a war-surplus Vultee Vibrator. The Stearman originally came with a 220-horsepower engine, and when you stuck a 450 on its nose, you could almost pull stumps with it. A character in Wyoming came back lugging four fence posts and several hundred feet of wire. In Mississippi, a 450-hp Stearman tore down a transcontinental power line which left

half the state population without power or light, and flew on home as if nothing had happened. There doesn't seem to be any limit to the versatility of airplanes in this business. You can weed wheat-fields, using the new bread-leaf killer, 2 4-D; you can plant rice, pollenate peaches, stock fingerling trout, defoliate cotton, kill grasshoppers, tent caterpillars, mosquitoes and hundreds of other bugs—and one county in California claims it has successfully prevented hail by aerial treatment for years. Although there have been frequent scares in various communities over DDT poisoning of animals and humans, the only known casualty on record is that of a farm lady who baked DDT into a cake, thinking it was a can of baking powder. Even this mistake did not result in death.

While Bruggeman was changing from his natty sports jacket and slacks (his collecting uniform) into the white jumper and flight boots (his dusting uniform), Joan drove me back to a cabbage farm in the hills where Bob was going to put on his next airshow. The place turned out to be a gruesome little hollow, walled in by a tall ridge on the east, complicated by the presence of a large barn; telephone wires bordered the field on the west. When Joan drove in, a small group of local folks had assembled to witness the crash if it happened.

Presently from the distance came a low moaning. A yellow speck appeared in the peaceful evening sky, sprouted tiny wings, then came smoothly over our valley. It lined up for an east-west pass, skimmed the ridge, motor idling quietly, and made a steep sickening dive into the cabbage patch. For an instant I thought Bruggeman was going to dig his own grave with his propeller. Then he caught the plane neatly—a scant two feet above the cabbages—and a heavy cloud of greenish-white dust plumed out of the belly and washed down powerfully among the plants with the downbeat of the propeller. The Stearman bored across the field so low we could see the top of Bob's white helmet, then the 220-hp Continental let loose a bellow which jittered the convertible's ash tray, and the plane shot straight up, missing the wires by three or four feet.

The plane climbed vertically, ran out of flying speed, and sagged around in a slow, efficient, deadly "Duster Turn." This is the maneuver where they separate the students from the instructors (and sometimes the living from the dead). It is necessary in the interests of efficient dusting, but if you get a shade too slow, or get your controls slightly crossed, the airplane is apt to flip over on its back, make a lazy nose-down gyration, and hit the deck like a crate of eggs.

"How about this?" I asked Joan, as Bob completed the slow turn. "Doesn't this guy worry you at times?"

"Oh, no," said Joan, lighting her fourth cigarette from the half-smoked butt of number three. "I simply refuse to worry. I simply put the whole thing out of my mind . . . ooooooh—pull it UP, Bob!"

I snapped my head around in time to see Bruggeman graze the roof in front of us and go howling over the trees of the ridge, making their leaves flutter with his propwash.

"Sorry," Joan said. "I just thought Bob was going through the man's barn." Then, with sudden decision. "Let's get out of here! Would you mind?"

I suppose crop dusting beats lying in a pool of paint under a Ford assembly line, and I'd rather go out with a big bang than rust apart at the seams. But from where I sit, Bruggeman and the 7,000 other guys who make their living dusting crops can have it and welcome. The days when you make \$80 are few and far between. The days when it blows a gale; when you rap on the door to collect a bill and see the curtain move but nobody comes; when the meter throws a jug and it costs \$50 to get another one (if you can find it); when you dress up in your dark clothes and take the long, slow

walk for a dusting buddy—these, unfortunately, are all too close together. After Bruggeman has paid his hangar rent, maintenance, fuel, transportation, sales costs, and incidentals, he is lucky to pay income taxes on \$6,000 a year. Some years it's much lower than that.

There's a glimmer of light, however, on the horizon. A special dusting plane, known as the AG 1, has been developed down in Texas, which carries like an elephant, slows down to a crawl without spinning in, and can be handled by an old man with glasses. It is already flying. The Yellow Perils are gradually wearing out. Tomorrow, they say, will be better. When they do it from captive balloons I may even consider getting into the racket myself. ■ ■