

## MID-CONTINENT AIRCRAFT CORPORATION

# PLANEGRAM



### DUST TRAILS

By: Buck Rogers

from: *THE SWATH WORLD-WIDE - July 1957*

I can't figure how these things get started and why I'm always the guy in the middle holding the bag. There are enough calculated risks in this business without more being added such as being dive bombed by a slap happy, neurotic bald headed eagle and his whole family. Besides that, he goes and enlists a bunch of wood peckers on this side.

Here I am going along minding my own business, dropping a few pounds of dust here and there and completely at peace with the world - well, as much at peace as a crop duster can be - when, one morning while making a turn at the end of a field, I look down and spot this eagle sitting in an old dead tree, haughty as can be and looking like he owns the whole cockeyed world. I drop down to take a closer look because that's sort of a rare bird in this neck of the woods. Sure enough, he's one of those baldheaded eagles which I remember right away is our national bird.

Well, I'm a fairly patriotic sort of a guy and seeing what he is, I figure he deserves a salute of some kind; so I cruise by real close and dip a wing of the Stearman at him. As I do I notice he has a nest with a wife sitting in it. The old boy just gives me a cold stare but it ain't so with his wife. A real gleam comes into her eye and she sort of ducks

her head, real coy like, and shyly flips a wing. Guess she figures what a real he-bird this thing is that's flying by. I come to the conclusion the old boy she's teamed up with maybe ain't what he use to be, or something, but mighty quick get my mind changed about that.

Old Baldy sees this little by-play and, quick as a flash, spins around and knocks his helpmate flat on her keester. She climbs back to her work real fast and starts hatching little eaglets like mad. The old boy sure knows how to handle his women and I make a mental note of his procedure for future reference.

Baldy shows his contempt for me by turning his back and reaching around to pluck the lice outta the roots of his tail feathers and I get a full view. I've sure seen better.

I let the insult go, figuring he's just old and crabby, something with which can easily sympathize. Anyway, I've got work to do and can't be messing around with an anti-social eagle, so I finish putting out that load and head back to the strip for another.

While I'm loading up I get to thinking. If Baldy's got bugs in his rugs and I give him a little dust job and clean up his place for him he might appreciate it and we can get to be friends. Sometimes the farmers

have us drop some on their houses and it should work for the eagle.

Next trip I got rid of most of my load and then slid over to Baldy's place to do my good deed. He's still sitting there with his beak stuck up as important as ever. He looks like Mussolini on a pyramid. His wife's tending strictly to her knitting and this time doesn't even give the Stearman a glance. Baldy's sure got a Indian sign on her and I make another mental note.

I dropped in and let out a nice generous blurb of 10% DDT and 50% sulfur, pulled up and looked back to survey the results. I sure got some!

Didja ever hear an eagle scream? I don't mean on payday, but way up in the Wild Blue Yonder. Old Baldy shot straight up for about two thousand feet, let out a screech you could hear for twenty miles, did a Split-S and busted the sound barrier as he came in on me from six o'clock high. He must have had plenty experience handling venison because when he zooms up he has all the six pounds of Buck meat in his talons which he's tearing to shreds with his beak and tossing back over his shoulder like a flower girl at a wedding. To add insult to injury, that danged Mrs. Eagle

*continued inside*

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comes in at nine o'clock low, bores a hole through the bottom of the fuselage and chaws off both my boots and sock sand leaves me there trying to maneuver that Stearman in my bare feet- and me in a dog fight with her old man. What a team! If we'd just had them over in Europe during the last mess...

I'm in pretty bad shape and don't linger. I let out what little dust I had left, which sorta smoke- screened me enough to get a head start, and tear for the home field. I landed like a ruptured duck with a bellyache, stepped out onto a bunch of cockleburs in my bare feet, passed out and fell flat on my kisser. Just before I fainted I heard Bob White, my boss, say, "Well, flew through another power line, huh?" I wasn't even interested.

When I finally came to, Bob and his wife, Paula, are surveying me and the Stearman and are pretty well convinced it wasn't a power line this time. He asks me what happened and I gave him the story about the eagle and his old lady.

I can't figure why people don't believe me. I've never been known to stretch things or embellish the facts as you all know. Anyway, Bob just doesn't buy my story. In fact, he blows up thinking I'm trying to cover up something.

"Okay, okay!" he storms, "I'll go finish the job my self. That farmer wants his job done this morning. He can't wait a week.

I try to plead with him not to go sticking his neck out but he won't listen. I figure he's being pretty hard-

head about it, something which it doesn't take a squadron of woodpeckers long to prove. I didn't know about the woodpeckers then but this old stack of bones and feathers that calls himself an eagle musta gone out and signed 'em up right after he shot me down. Looks like he planned an all-out war.

Bob cranks up the Stearman - it's in fair shape except for the hole in the bottom and takes off. In about thirty minutes we hear him coming back and he's really mobilizing, wide open and barely staying in the air. He makes three passes at the strip but can't make it and as he goes by we can see why. The Stearman has more holes in it than a sieve and you could run the whole Colorado River through it and never dam up a drop.

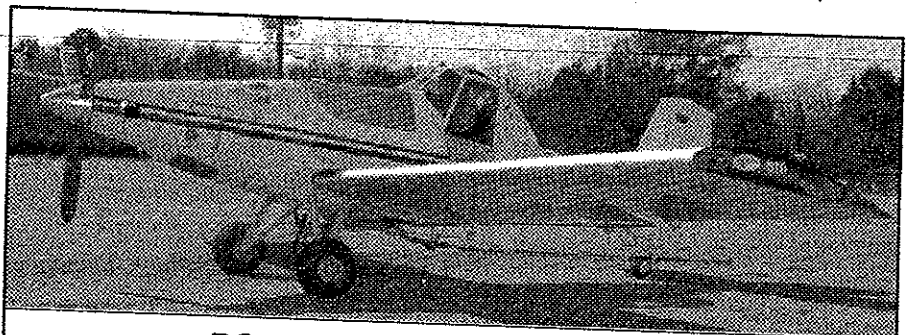
After the third pass we see Bob head for Sequoia field and we know he's going to try and set her down there. Paula and I jump into Clarabelle - well, Paula jumps, I just

crawl-and we head there too. I grab a couple of gunnysacks in which to pick up the pieces as I figure that's all there's gonna be. Clarabelle grasps the situation and we get there while Bob's going around on his sixth try. He finally makes it on the seventh but only on account of he can't see so good any more and winds up going in the door of Curly Adam's hangar. The other door's shut.

Miraculously, there's enough left of Bob to crawl out of the wreckage. He's yelling his head off and fit to be tied.

"Why didn't ya tell me about the woodpeckers?" he screams "Millions of em Wassamatter with ya? Why didn't ya tell me?" He's standing there in nothing but his shorts; that's all those birds left him with. I took a look at his head and could see what he was complaining about.

"Well, like I been telling him ever since. You can't fool a woodpecker.



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