

Hudson Goes From Sweeping Floors to Dusting Fields

BY ANDY CLINE

Crop dusting, or rather aerial application, is big business these days. "It's a science", says Joe Hudson, who runs his own application business from an office at Five Points. "It's not the glamor thing where you put on an air show."

But from what I saw, there is still that hint of romance left.

Foremost in the minds of aerial applicators, according to Hudson, is higher yields of food and a lower price for consumers. All this is possible with modern, efficient application methods. From the air today, crops are planted and fertilized as well as sprayed for insects. It is a growing science in the battle to keep people fed.

It is a tricky business, flying over and around the fields of Sussex County. The pilot must have quick reactions and full concentration. Joe Hudson doesn't fly the dusters much anymore. He says his eyes are not as good as they once were. His team of pilots do most of the work. But he still flies and enjoys his private plane.

Hudson has been interested in flying all his life. In 1946, while in the 10th grade, he got a job "sweeping up" at the Rehoboth airport. During these years he traded working time for flying lessons.

By his senior year in high school, he had a commercial pilots license and a contract to spray mosquitoes for the state of Delaware. He also ran charter flights and did fish spotting.

Hudson says "it was interesting work" and "it was a chance to earn money". He later turned down a chance at college on a football scholarship in order to fly.

Started Spraying in 1950

In 1950, Hudson began his aerial application business. He began with two World War II vintage aircraft. Just as he does today, it then took a lot of trading to build up to the more modern equipment.

Joe Hudson seems the natural flier. But inexperience on his second day's work in aerial application ended in his wrecking one of his planes.

He explains that there was this flag pole that he "kind of miscalculated". His injuries were not serious. Within two weeks he was at it again.

In 1956, Hudson hired L.R. "Buddy" Lewis who has been with him since.

Two brothers, Allen and Ronny Chorman, do the bulk of the application. And ground man Billy White "keeps 'em flying."

The team works out of Hudson's private air strip about five miles north of Lewes.

For agricultural work, Hudson uses the most modern equipment available. But tucked away at the Sussex County Airport in Georgetown is a 1942 vintage bomber trainer Hudson uses for insect control.

Buddy Lewis takes care of this end of the operation. The old girl looks a little patched together, but it's in good shape and the only plane the state will let Hudson use over populated areas. It is truly a nostalgic thing to see it as it lifts off slowly, banks off, and heads out over the farmlands.

It's hard to believe that all the romance is gone. Little things observed say that the taste of the old days is still on the tongues of Hudson and his team: Billy White's smile as I asked if he kept 'em flyin', each pilot's name painted by the cockpit—minus only a kill count, and the unmistakable pride taken in the work and machine.

Watching a crop duster, sorry, aerial applicator, at work is enough to convince that romance is not dead. It was hard to believe, as I watched the sleek, racey craft bank steeply and then zoom inches from the crop expelling the load, that the pilot doesn't get a thrill from the experience. You could see the thrill in Hudson's eyes as he looked over his small fleet of planes and related his experiences.

One Field of Wheat

It took perhaps 15 passes to complete the small field of wheat that evening. The low pass was followed by a steep climb and bank. The plane seemed to float for a moment as it turned for another pass. Then it disappeared behind the trees. An engine roar was heard, it reappeared skimming the tree line, dodging power lines and dropping quickly to the wheat. Another low sweep, away from me this time.

Against the dark of the woods, the craft rose and banked into the sun. His load was done. Still flying low he headed west for home.

As the duster disappeared in the pink dusk it was hard to imagine the pilot thinking, "Another field with a higher yield because of aerial application".



Joe Hudson takes a call in his private hanger.



Joe Hudson and pilot Allen Chorman discuss the evenings plans, applying insecticide to a small field of wheat on route 24.

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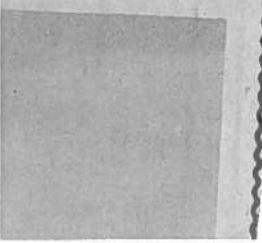
It takes great control to skim this wheat maybe 18" from disaster.



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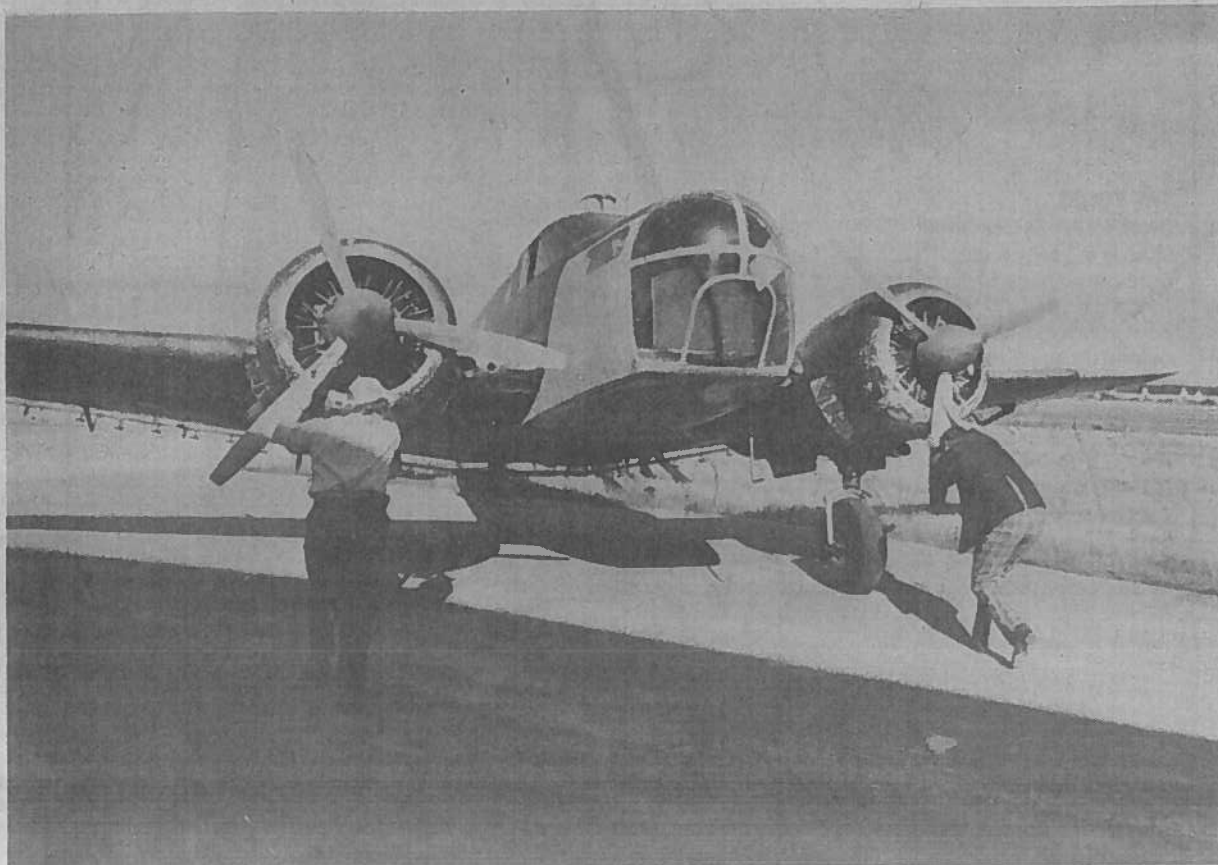
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The old bird looks like she needs help out of the hanger, but in the air she still performs her job well. This 1942 vintage bomber trainer kills mosquitoes for the state.