



## Life's up in the air for crop duster

Usually, Tom Doryland never knows what he will be doing from one day to the next. He spends a lot of time at the Weather Bureau Office at Lincoln Municipal Airport trying to figure that out.

He makes a living spraying farmer's fields with a variety of pesticides. Some chemicals can be sprayed from as high as 20 feet. Most are applied from 4 to 6 feet off the ground. The wheels of his plane sometimes touch corn and grain sorghum leaves.

Doryland can't spray unless the conditions are just right. If it's too hot, the pesticide may evaporate before it kills any pests. If it's too windy, or blowing in the wrong direction, the pesticide may go places it isn't needed, such as shelter belts or farm gardens.

When the conditions aren't right for flying, he walks his customers' fields, checking for infestations of aphids, green bugs, corn borers and other pests, depending on the season. He works for about 150 farmers, all in the vicinity of his hanger, which is about 10 miles north of Lincoln.

Doryland, 69, has been flying since World War II. He taught basic flying to army and navy pilots at Lincoln's defunct Union Airport. After the war, he decided to continue flying as a crop duster because he said he doesn't like commercial flying. He has logged 20,000 hours, or more than two years — in the air.

When the conditions are right, Doryland warms up his plane, named Bessie, and takes off from his grass runway for what he calls "enjoyable flying."

"You don't have to talk to anybody on the radio, unless you're near the tower (at Lincoln Municipal Airport); you just fly," he said.

At last count, four Nebraska crop-dusters had crashed their planes this spring and summer. One, who crashed near Shelton, lost his life, said Hale Dodge, operations specialist at the Nebraska Department of Aeronautics.

Doryland says he never thinks about crashing. He said he read somewhere that being a barber is more dangerous than flying.

Watching Doryland fly 4 feet over the ground, his wheels kissing the crop, then gliding under the telephone wires before turning around, it's very hard to believe.



Story and photos by Chris Welsch



Top photos: Doryland prepares his plane for a spraying run. Above left: Doryland examines grain sorghum plant for green bug. Above right: Low flying means four to six feet off the ground. Above: Doryland sprays a field near Prairie Home. Far left: Doryland indicates the pump unit he uses to fill his plane with pesticide. Left: The pilot heads home after spraying three fields early in the morning.