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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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Authority on Meteorology.

BURNING A HOLE IN A FOG

A small-scale experiment in the artificial dissipation of fog that "worked" is described in the current Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society on the authority of R. C. Soney. Here is the story:

"A pilot taking off from Cleveland for New York was informed that while the air was clear both at Bellefonte, Pa., and Hadley Field, N.Y., the visibility was decreasing and clouds showed a tendency to close in. The pilot, however, decided to risk the flight, thinking that he could land at Bellefonte in case Hadley Field were foggy. Reaching Bellefonte, the pilot found the field foggy and the landing impracticable. Hadley Field was still clear. When half way from Bellefonte to Hadley there came the report by radio that fog had closed in on Hadley. Without sufficient gas to return to Cleveland and with no landing practicable at Bellefonte, the pilot continued toward Hadley.

"The ground organization at Hadley, of which Mr. Soney was then a member, could soon hear the airplane circling overhead, and now and then throttling down and almost making a landing, but zooming up again just before it could have touched the ground. The fog was too dense. Realizing that the pilot would soon be out of gas and would have to land somewhere, the ground organization undertook to burn a hole through the fog by pouring and igniting two 50-gallon hogsheads of gasoline in the center of the field. The pilot, who was apprised by radio of the plan, circled around around the fire watching for a hole. As the fire died down a hole appeared, through which the pilot dived to a safe landing on the field."

Presumably the fog was shallow and the air was calm. Generally speaking, the dissipation of a fog by heating it is, according to circumstances, either physically impossible or prohibitively expensive.

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