

Catholic Priest Is 'Sky Pilot' Who Really Believes In Riding Sky Lanes

By John B. Curlls

SANTA FE, April 13 (A) — The Rev. Richard E. Spellman, 28-year-old Santa Fe Catholic priest, is a "sky pilot" who really believes in riding the air lanes.

Father Spellman—no relation to Archbishop Spellman of New York—is assistant pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe parish in Santa Fe and director of youth activities for the Archdiocese. He recently purchased his own plane, a two-place 1941 Piper coupe, and flew it here nonstop from Colorado Springs in three and a half hours.

He has been flying for five and a half years, holds a private pilot's license and has flown Catholic dignitaries including Bishop Shiel, auxiliary bishop of Chicago, and the Most Reverend Edwin V. Byrne, Archbishop of Santa Fe, an ardent traveler-by-air. A few days after Archbishop Byrne was installed here last September he was flown by Father Spellman to Tucson, Arizona, for the consecration of James P. Davis as bishop of San Juan, P.R.

Father Spellman, who studied at

St. Thomas Seminary in Denver and was ordained in Chicago February 2, 1943, has been in and out of New Mexico for the last six or seven years, spending his summers doing catechetical work in outlying sections.

"I saw a couple of ranchers using planes in their work," he said, "and it occurred to me that if planes could fit in so well there, why not in furthering the work of the church, too? As a youngster, I was crazy about planes and was always fooling around with models.

So I studied up on various instances where planes had been used by church people. Then I began contacting different air schools."

During his 1938 summer vacation he entered the Lewis school of aeronautics in Chicago, then conducted under the auspices of the Chicago archdiocese and later taken over by the Navy. Eight weeks to the day after taking his first lesson, he passed his private pilot's test. He now has several hundred hours in the air and has

flown all types of ships in all parts of the country.

Father Spellman is a first lieutenant and squadron commander in the New Mexico wing of the civil air patrol, with which he has more than a year's active service. He has participated in active duty missions with the CAP bomber search group and was one of the fliers who several weeks ago located from the air the crashed CAP plane in which two Roswell young men were killed while seeking a missing army bomber.

His new plane has a cruising speed of 90 miles an hour and its cruising range is 450 miles. He points out that he can now fly nonstop to any point in New Mexico.

Inasmuch as his recent appointment by the Archbishop as Archdiocesan Youth Director will require considerable traveling about the state, Father Spellman intends to use his plane wherever possible and practical. He is a confirmed advocate of air travel as an economical mode of getting around and as a time saver.