

By Ernie Deane

Byers and Rushers Bring Ducks to Brinkley

IF IN SEARCH OF A WAY to start a hot argument at Brinkley, just mention to some of the fellows hanging around the lobby of the Hotel Rusher that the duck hunting at Stuttgart is the best in Arkansas.

Right off they'll bundle you into an automobile and haul you about 15 miles northeast to Bill Byers' place near Hunter.

Byers, it turns out, is a solid chunk of man who raises rice and soybeans and such for a living, and hunts ducks for fun. Byers doesn't particularly care what the other fellow does to earn his keep so long as he, too, likes to hunt ducks.

Now I'm not aiming to get caught in any crossfire between Brinkley and Stuttgart over the subject of ducks. For all I know the hunting is excellent at both places, maybe the best in the world.

I'd been told, however, that Bill

Byers is a rare sort of character, and that he and a few friends run an outstanding hunting operation that is growing in popularity.

So when I learned that Al Barnes of Little Rock, the advertising manager of Southwest Hotels Inc., was on his way, gun in hand, to Brinkley for some duck shooting I joined him—camera in hand.

SO FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, getting up before daylight and clothing oneself with insulated underbritches, rubber wading boots, and the like, and then standing around in the cold water waiting for a duck, is really great—for other folks.

In short, I didn't go to shoot mallards with a gun but to "shoot" mallard hunters with a camera, and to get a few notes on the enterprise that Byers and his buddies have developed.

Byers himself gave me much of the information I was after. And hotel keepers Albert L. Rusher and his son A. E. Rusher added other details.

As things have turned out, it appears that Byers' love of hunting has proved an asset, not only for himself and friends but for Brinkley and vicinity as well.

Back in 1952 he took 300 acres of farm and woodland and converted them into a water-covered area attractive to ducks. Live pinoaks that produced a bountiful supply of acorns were of special interest to the feathered migrants winging their way southward from Canada.

This first venture into the business of luring ducks into gun range was, in Byers' words, "strictly a friendship deal." He and his pals had themselves a time.

It wasn't long before more and more hunters heard of the good shoot-

ing to be enjoyed, and he received inquiries about the possibility of paying for hunting rights.

HE DECIDED TO EXPAND, and he did it on a grand scale. He acquired 1,800 acres in 1956—and has since added 160 more—around which he threw up levees to impound water in the open and wooded areas. And he built a 20-foot long "lodge" of corrugated iron sheeting beside a road that cut through the property.

Starting in August he pumped water into the area to supplement that already there, and by the opening of the duck season was ready both for ducks and hunters.

His friends pitched in to help take care of paying guests, this in turn for continued free hunting privileges. The fee for the hunter who pays, incidentally, is \$10 a day with "satisfaction guaranteed." But the guest gets no pampering. He retrieves his own ducks from the water, for example.

Business has continued to improve. On the day I was at the lodge recently, Byers' records showed that more than 4,700 ducks have been killed this season, by hunters from numerous states. Several men from New York were there the same day I was, and a party of Wisconsin men was due in by private airplanes last week.

Hunters from Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, Tennessee and other states return each season, he said.

BYERS FIGURES that he's helping to attract visitors to Arkansas who had never come here before.

I found that he and the Rushers, who operate a motel as well as a hotel in Brinkley, work together to promote business based on duck hunting.

Byers urges hunters to spend a night or two in nearby Brinkley. The Rushers, in turn, receive many inquiries from around the country concerning hunting facilities and they recommend Byers' place.

Byers and both Rushers told me that they see daily evidence throughout the hunting season that the local economy is helped by the money that hunters spend for food, shells, equipment, gas and oil, items of clothing, souvenirs and such. The Rusher Hotel staff has to be supplemented during the season to take care of processing ducks for guests, an example of new jobs created by the presence of hunters.

Bill Byers came into the Brinkley area in 1944 as a tenant farmer and

has succeeded well, indeed, this no doubt in part because he is ingenious—he built a 65-foot tall steel tower at his hunting lodge, for example, from which to spot the landing places of incoming ducks.

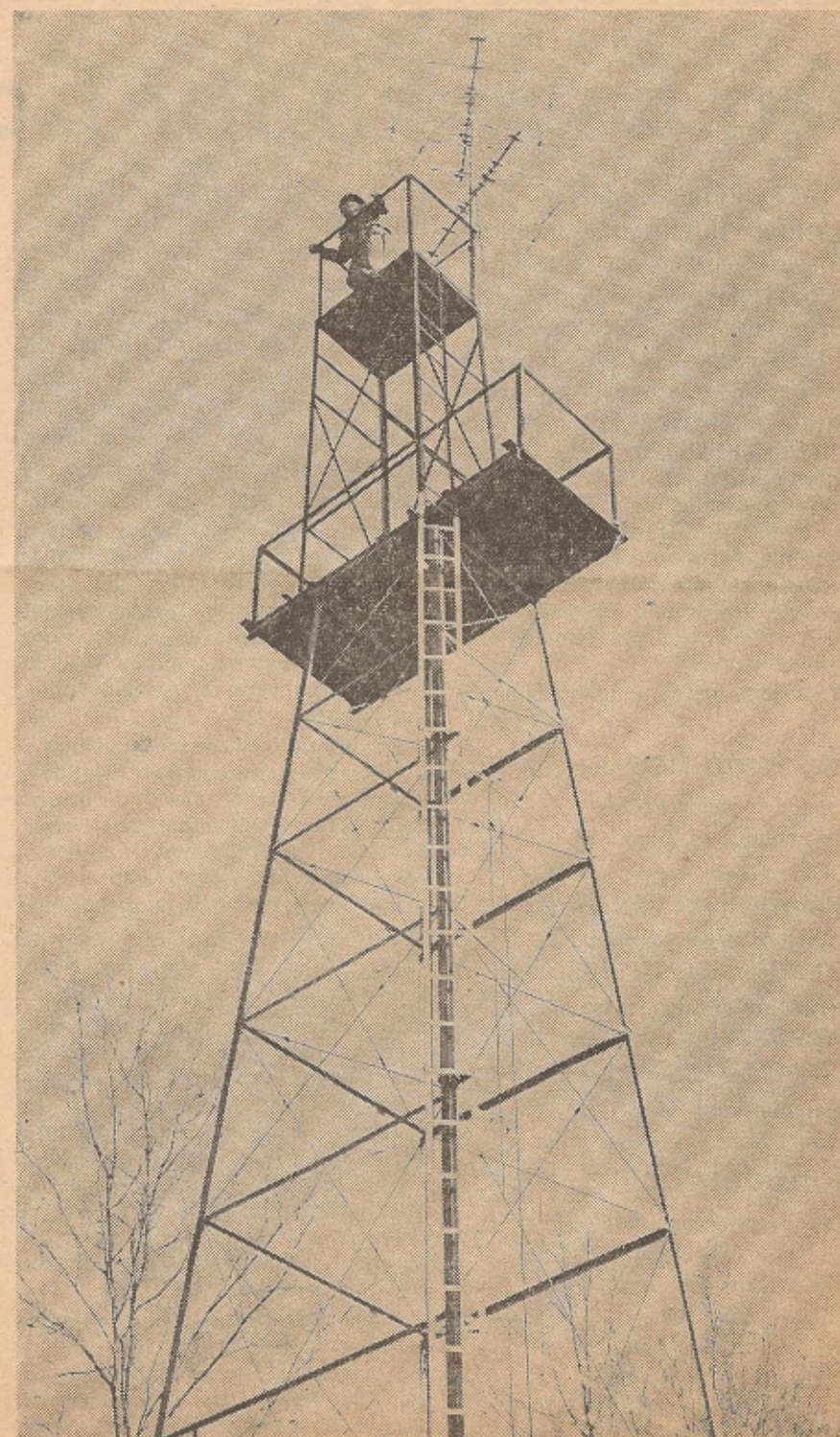
ALBERT L. RUSHER'S FATHER pioneered in the hotel business in Brinkley and his son Al "Junior" rep-

resents the third generation. A sample of their business enterprise is the motel which they constructed in recent years—sort of joining rather than fighting competition, you might say.

And before I run out of space, Al Barnes and every other hunter got his limit of ducks the day I was at Byers' lodge.



Al Barnes (left) and Bill Byers display some of the ducks shot near Brinkley on Byers' land.



Byers stands atop his steel tower, watching for ducks.

—Staff Photos