

War Stories (cont.)

his P-40, flipped over on his back, and died of a broken neck. He was not replaced till early 1944 when Col. "Black Bob" Baker arrived.

It was also at this approximate time period that the India-China Wing got a new CO, Brig Gen Earl S. Hoag. In order to increase tonnage over The Hump, he ordered all Valley aircraft to fly around the clock. The monsoons had ended, and Perry, Fallon and I kept our remaining C-87 very busy. I made 35 round trips to Kunming in the 70 day period between Oct. 10 and Dec. 18, 1943.

On Nov. 16 copilot Howard Tweed and I picked up 35 Chinese troops at Sookerating. For some reason the passenger oxygen system had not been serviced that day. Not wanting a cabin full of hypoxiated, sick or dead Chinamen, I swung far south of my normal easterly course, picked my way through numerous mountain passes, and flew to Kunming without going above 11,000 feet nor donning an oxygen mask. Obviously the weather was very good that day.

On several return trips from Kunming we had litter patients attended by doctors and medical technicians of the 803w Aero Medical Evacuation Squadron. Because we had piled a lot of flying hours on our plane, it went down for a major scheduled inspection in late December.

On the last day of 1943 Earl Perry took off from Chabua around 11 PM with a large load of passengers. Shortly after departure he radioed that he had mechanical problems and that he was turning around. According to copilot Dick Nye's account (See page 493 in Volume One of CHINA AIRLIFT-THE HUMP), the aircraft had lost two engines.

Shortly after Earl's departure a pea-soup winter ground fog had developed in the Valley and he obviously could not get into Chabua under virtual zero-zero conditions. We heard at the time that Earl had made 2-3 passes at Sook before crashing. Earl was killed and Dick Nye was critically injured and was in a coma for 21 days before awaking to find he had lost a leg,

Questions about this flight have lingered in my mind for the past 60 years. Was a Functional Test Flight performed before the fatal flight?--- an absolute must after a major inspection, engine change, work on

the aircraft control system, prolonged groundings, etc Did the aircraft really lose two engines, virtually simultaneously? (Dick was comatose for a long time after the crash and could have had memory problems). Also, the P&W R-1 830 was one of the most reliable piston engines ever produced. Did Earl have other alternatives? Could he have searched for better weather with eight hours of fuel aboard?

An interesting sidelight: Shortly before this flight Earl had gone to the mess hall to pay his end-of-the-month mess bill. The Mess Sergeant said "No problem, Captain, you can pay it tomorrow morning when you return from your flight" Earl responded, "I may not be back"

Premonition? Who knows?

CHINESE MULE PLANE

(This article is dedicated to our Historian E. J. "Bud" Albers who has long been determined to verify that mules were actually flown over the Hump in aircraft.)

During late May, 1994, I received a long distance call. The voice, on the phone said, "My name is ALEX KAPLAN. I was your R/O that night the mules got loose over China." Caught by surprise, I think I said, "Yea, I sure remember that night! That is one flight I will never forget." We talked about that and other experiences in the CBI for quite a while.

I don't remember the name of my co-pilot, nor did I remember that Alex was my R/O. I just remembered having to abort a landing at Chanyi, China, and going around the mountain side, at tree top level, skimming the trees, with five mules sliding around the cabin, until I managed to level out toward the valley.

Alex and I were stationed at Myitkyina, Burma, assigned to the 1348th AAFBU, ATC, flying C-47 aircraft. We had been flying Chinese troops into the Kunming, China, area for their push against the Japanese. Our unit was given the job of flying horses and mules belonging to the Chinese 5th Army to China. (It may have been the 6th Army -I don't really remember.) I was the first, or at least one of the first, to fly mules to Chanyi, China.