

## War Stories (cont.)

Anyhow, five mules were loaded aboard-our C-47 that night, along with two Chinese soldiers who were to take care of the mules. The mules wore bridles, and each was tied to the tie-downs on the floor of the cabin with no other restraint. The two soldiers immediately retired to the latrine and closed the door. We took off and climbed to altitude, normally 12,500', and headed for China on Dog Route. Being a compassionate person, I didn't want the mules and their keepers to be uncomfortable while at altitude, so I turned the cabin heat on. What a BIG mistake! We had an uneventful flight over China, arriving over Chanyi, and beginning our letdown on the radio beacon. This was also uneventful.

Every flight crew flying into Chanyi was familiar with the approach, but for those unfamiliar with the area, a description is in order. The landing strip was located at the north end of a long, flat valley, I believe 20 miles or so long. Immediately north, the landing strip was surrounded by mountains which extended to the south along each side of the valley, over which we made our approach from the south. Upon arrival over the radio beacon, which was just south of the landing strip, we turned south and proceeded to lose altitude, flying a specific time/distance letdown, then turned back north, continuing the letdown toward the radio beacon until at final altitude for the landing approach. This particular night the weather was good over the valley, however my letdown was according to instrument procedures, in order to stay clear of the mountains on each side of the valley.

I let down to landing approach altitude, arriving over the radio beacon, beginning the landing approach, with gear down, quarter flaps, and reduced power, then full flaps, for final approach. I don't remember when it happened, but the MULES HAD ALL BROKEN LOOSE AND SLID TO THE FRONT OF THE CARGO CABIN, ALL BUNCHED UP. The ship nosed over and we went into a dive. At this point, Alex said that one of the mules stuck her head in the door and looked at him. With only a couple of hundred feet above the runway, I cranked nose up trim, put full power on, retracted gear, bled flaps and proceeded to climb. Alex said he thought something was going on, from his radio position, when he saw

everything in the cockpit moving forward. We started to climb out for another approach and the mules slid to the REAR OF THE CABIN. I had to trim again, fast. With the mountains ahead, I had to start a steep turn to the right, trying to climb out without clobbering into the mountains. We continued a climbing turn, with the treetops on the mountain slope almost brushing the bottom of the ship. Anymore movement of our cargo would have meant disaster.

We finished our turning climb-out to landing approach altitude and flew south for quite some distance. I used a procedure taught to me by an airline pilot who had been recalled from Reserves. With gear down, about quarter flaps, and somewhat around half power, I made a shallow letdown (which was normally used for the comfort of airline passengers though not necessarily used today), all the way to the runway, keeping the cabin floor *as* level to the ground as possible. We landed without any problems. I guess the mules stayed put, wherever they were. When we returned to Myitkyina, I reported the incident and changes were made. Instead of five animals being loaded, only four were hauled on later trips. A bamboo pole was placed fore and aft in the cabin and another short pole was installed across the fuselage, dividing the cabin into four corrals. We also kept the cabin heat OFF in order to tranquilize these critters. All later flights with horses and mules were uneventful.

Alex's call was really appreciated, I can now confirm this WWII story to my barbershop buddies who may have had reservations, and restore my credibility. I only hope our co-pilot on this flight reads this and can be recognized.

*Editor's Note: The pilot in this story, never directly mentioned, was Phil T. Dunning, ATC, stationed Myitkyina at the time of this story.*

## Basic Flying Rule

Try to stay in the middle of the air. Do not go near the edges of it. The edges of the air can be recognized by the appearance of ground, buildings, sea, trees, and interstellar space. It is much more difficult to fly there.