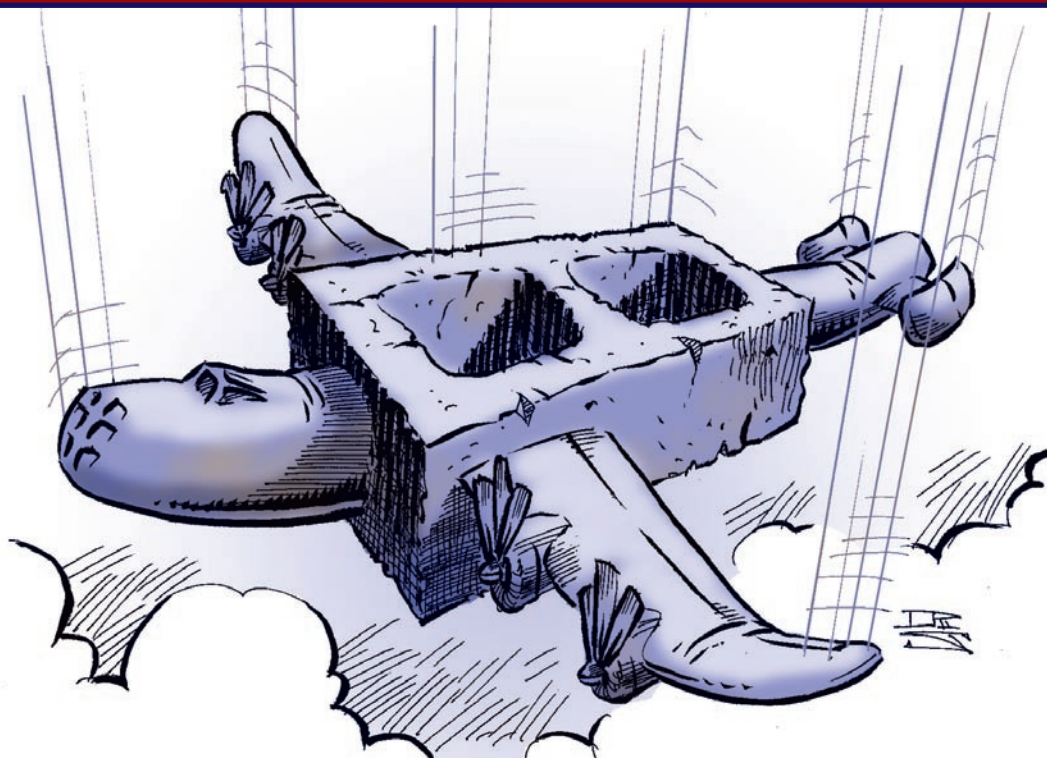


Bomber Tales



“GLIDE” CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LIB: AN OXYMORON

Some of you other old airplane drivers may remember the “glide” characteristics of the B-24 (best known to me as the PB4Y-1) when you lost power on all four engines. I was introduced to this one day in 1944 while transitioning from PBYs (the lovely old twin engine Catalina) to the Libs. I might note that my few hundred hours in P-boats, including horsing one of them into a nose high attitude for a full stall landing on the water, had built up my arms enough to deal with the Lib’s heaviness on the controls.

We were cruising at 5000 feet, returning to our base at NAS Hutchison, Kansas after a few hours of instrument training and general air work. About 10 miles south of the field my instructor called Hutch tower requesting a straight-in approach to runway 36. Tower cleared us for the straight in, advised wind from north and barometer setting. He then told me to line up for 36, maintain 5,000 feet and tell him when the approach end of runway 36 disappeared under the ball turret on the nose. That made me more than a bit curious, but I rolled the Lib, lining her up to runway 36 as instructed. When the approach end disappeared under the nose, I notified him of such. He immediately pulled all four throttles back to idle (15 inches manifold pressure for zero thrust), dropped the gear, moved the mixture controls to full rich, dropped half-flap and shoved all four props to high RPM. He looked across the cockpit at me and said, “Maintain airspeed and land her, call for full flap when ready!” My plane captain (first mech) who was sitting on the jump seat with his headset on had obviously heard

our conversation over the intercom. A brief glance at his face across my right shoulder indicated that he, as well as I, didn’t have the foggiest notion how we were going to avoid over-shooting the runway.

I was shoving forward on the yoke, for the airspeed indicator was rapidly unwinding and the rate of descent indicator was pegging down. That didn’t do the job, so I rapidly rolled-in nose down tab, all the time thinking, “My God, we are going to land long!” I was still rolling in down tab as I glanced at the airspeed and the still rapidly unwinding altimeter and then back up and saw the runway looming up over the nose turret! We were going down like a rock. Seconds later I called for full flap, horsed the yoke back, rapidly cranking-in nose up tab, rotated, flared-out and a fully stalled 4Y-1 crunched down on the numbers at the approach end of 36. I’ll bet our tail skag was off the end of the runway when we touched down! As we rolled out, my instructor leaned over and shouted, “See how she glides!” That’s how I learned that with power off, the Lib had all the glide characteristics of a brick, albeit a “flying one.” Slight exaggeration, as its approach profile without power (sink rate) was about 1 foot down for each foot forward. All in all, it was a damn good aircraft, but a glider she was not.

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