

Two Thumbs Up - Hazen  
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By: Joseph W. Hazen

On the 27th of September 1962, I flew Tony Poe into LS-85 (Phu Pha Thi) in Helio Courier B-861. After he conducted his business, we got back on board; I started up and prepared for takeoff.

For those not having been there, LS-85 was located on a karst several miles to the NW of Sam Neua (L-04), which was unfriendly territory.

The strip was higher in the middle than both ends, which prevented one from seeing the other end of the runway.

At the crest of the runway, (600'x50', elevation 4500'), on the left side, stood a Hmong soldier. As I was checking the mags, he extended an arm, with his thumb pointing skyward. As I released the brakes, his other arm went up and his other thumb pointed skyward.

When I got to the crest of the runway and could see the other end, I immediately knew two thumbs up meant TWO HORSES ON THE RUNWAY.

I proceeded straight ahead, pulled back on the yoke, got airborne and hit one horse with the right side landing gear. The horse was a tough Mao mountain pony about the size of a Welch pony with the stockiness of a Shetland (this is an editor's note to give the reader an idea of the size of the horses in the story). It went over the end of the runway to its' death. The other one ran off.

If I had attempted to stop, I believe I would have hit the horse, damaged the prop and airframe, gone over the end of the runway and cart wheeled down the side of the karst to the jungle floor, about 1000+' below. Not good.

Tony wanted to go back and shoot all the horses. I did not know if the aircraft sustained damage and elected to go to more friendly territory. Tony agreed.

I contacted the Company in Vientiane by HF radio and it was decided I should fly to Vientiane, land (night) at the west end of the runway, have an embassy car meet us, whisk Tony away and I would taxi to the ramp, if possible. Udorn would have been a better place to go, but I did not have the fuel to go there.

If the gear collapsed on landing, we, in theory, would be landing slow enough to survive without injury. Hmmm.

As it turned out, the aircraft did not have any damage and I assume it flew the next day. I flew it again on on 2 October and there were no squawks regarding the gear.

The next time I flew into and out of LS-85 was on 4 October in Helio Courier B-847. If there were any horses about, they were kept away from the runway.