

Janis Kozlowski: Well, the B-26 didn't have a real good reputation early on, especially when it was in the Aleutians. But, what was your feeling about that airplane?

John Pletcher: Well, my feeling about the airplane was, it was 100 mph faster than what I'd been flying - the B-18. But I felt well, it's an airplane and if you fly it right you ought to be able to get along all right with it, but you've got to be the master of it. I respected the airplane greatly, but I was not really afraid of it. Some of our pilots were actually afraid to fly it - they plain were afraid of the airplane. Well, I wasn't afraid of it but I sure respected the thing because I knew that it was a handful. Everybody else knew it. The ole B-18 you could make a lot of mistakes with it, or with the B-17 but you couldn't do that with the B-26 or you'd be in trouble. The fact that it landed about the speed that the B-18 cruised was [*chuckle*] another revelation, something you had to get used to pretty quick.

When I got down, well, we developed something up here that got us into trouble when we got down to MacDill - not real bad trouble, but - when we were up here, one of our problems was how you get those bullets stopped when you get them on the runway - we didn't have too long runways, usually. So, we devised the idea - I don't know who came up with the idea - that when you land and you get the main gear on the ground and you know you're on the ground, you have the co-pilot pull the mixture control to off to kill the engine. Well, the engine sits out there - these propellers were four bladed propellers, big old paddles out there - and you killed the engine it was sitting there, it wasn't even idling, the propeller was windmilling the engine. You'd be amazed at how much braking action you get from two big propellers sitting out there with eight big propeller blades broadside to the wind, forcing to turn those big engines and of course they would begin to slow down. Our procedure was that the engine would slow down but we didn't let them die. When we knew that the engine was slowing down - the prop was going pretty slow and it was gonna die - you tell the co-pilot, ok, shove it up to rich. We were ready for it, we were slowed down because the propellers had helped to slow us down, along with the flaps and the brakes - they helped us. So we had the airplane slowed down and under control, so when the engine came back on it was just normally idling and we got along fine with that. Of course, the co-pilot, everybody knew we were doing that, all the B-26 people.

Well, we got down to MacDill Field and one of our pilots got assigned as a co-pilot for one of their instructors down there. Well, on the landing [*chuckle*] he just, when the main gear was on the ground, without being told, he reached up there and pulled the mixture setting. Of course, the engines quit firing and the propellers gradually slowed down and this instructor-pilot that didn't know what was going on saw these engines slowing down and he thought the engines were about to die, and they were, the propellers would be going pretty slow. Well, about that time he was edging the throttles up, he had about half throttle on, trying to keep these engines from dying. About that time the co-pilot decided it was time to go to automatic rich so he shoves the mixture up and the engines catch and they're at half throttle and just about run off the end of the runway into the bay [*laughter*]. It scared the instructor half to death. Immediately there was an order that came down there would be no more cutting the mixture on landing [*laughter*]. But that was one of our local procedures that we used to save the brakes and tires [*laughing*].