Everest Base Camp -- Charter 038-03

A charter by Ron Bushell and Norman Hancock for DC-3 Airways (6 legs for about two and a half hours of flying time)

I did some of the test flying for Norman and Ron on this charter, but this is the first time I've flown the entire route since the charter was posted to the DC-3 Airways (DCA) web site. During that testing phase, I was also able to land on the glacier near Base Camp.

I'm going to walk you through many of these tough landings. There are warnings contained in the flight descriptions, and they really, really mean it. You'd better practice your short field landing techniques for this one.

The first leg to Janakpur, Nepal (VNJP) is straightforward and locating the runway is relatively easy. The first warning is that you're faced with a 3,200 foot runway at a 325 foot elevation. From here on in, it's all uphill (elevation) and downhill (landing conditions) from here.

You will face climbs to 17,000 feet before you reach the Everest Base Camp. Remember to lean your engine mixtures as you climb. You've been in Auto Rich up till now, but climbing higher will require that you manually lean the mixture. I use about one to two "notches" per 1,000 feet of climb. Use the keyboard to set the mixtures. Hold down the CONTROL and the SHIFT keys and tap the F2 key once for one notch or hit the F2 key twice for two notches, etc. to lean the mixture. Listen closely to your engines, and you may hear an increase in power as you lean the engines out. You should not hear a decrease in engine power -- if you do, you leaned them out too far.

On the way back down to lower altitudes, don't forget to enrich the mixtures as you descend (press and hold the CONTROL and the SHIFT keys and tap the F3 key for each "notch").

Okay, now it's time to get serious. The second leg leads to an airfield at an elevation of 4,098 feet and it's only 1,700 feet long. On top of that, the runway at Lamidada, Nepal (VNLD) sits on top of a plateau with virtually no overrun on either end.

On course at 5,100 MSL, about 4 nm from landing. The yellow arrow points to the approach end of the runway. It's above that white spot.

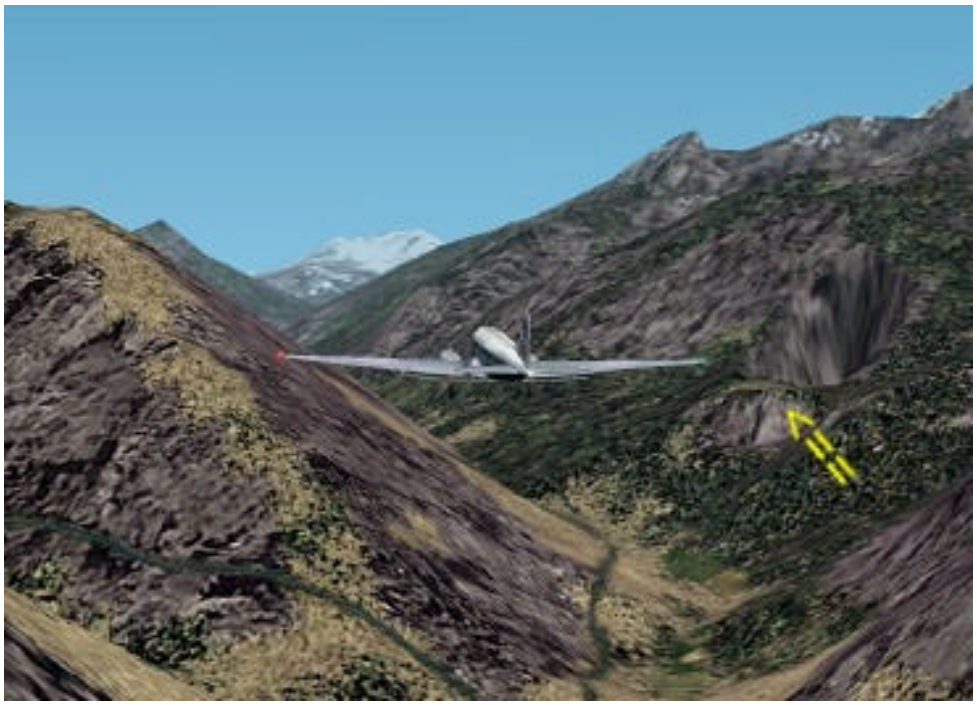
I'm doing a runway fly-over in this shot. I'm about 2 nm from the runway at 4,800 MSL. The touchdown point can be seen just below the right main gear.

The next challenge is Lukla, Nepal (VNLK). Going uphill to Everest, this 1,600 foot runway is at 9,097 MSL. It is set in a grotto in the right hand wall (heading toward the Base Camp, that is). You land here twice. Once on the way to the Everest Base Camp and again on the "downhill" run. There is one-way in, and one-way out -- there are no go around's. If you're not set up for the landing, don't try it.

Some might consider this cheating, but here's a way to save a bit of time in case you smash into a mountainside. About eight or ten miles from the runway, save the flight. In this case I used the name "Everest-last" and I reuse that name on the next leg. Of course, if you want several "re-start" points, use a different name for each. To save, use the menu: ALT + F(ile) then S(ave a file), enter the desired name and click [OK]. Now, if you splatter yourself into the granite, you can re-open the flight: ALT + F(ile), then F (Select a Flight) and pick Everest-last for the list.

These next two screen shots are taken on the downhill leg. Notice that the runway is on the left here.

Here (below) we are approaching VNLK for a landing. The first landing is straight up the valley following the trail seen at the bottom left. Note the fork in the trail, follow the right hand trail. On the way downhill, you pass the runway (as seen in the previous two pictures) and do a procedure turn a few miles past VNLK. Here, I'm at 9,600 MSL and set up for the landing. It's hard to pick out that runway (yellow arrow).



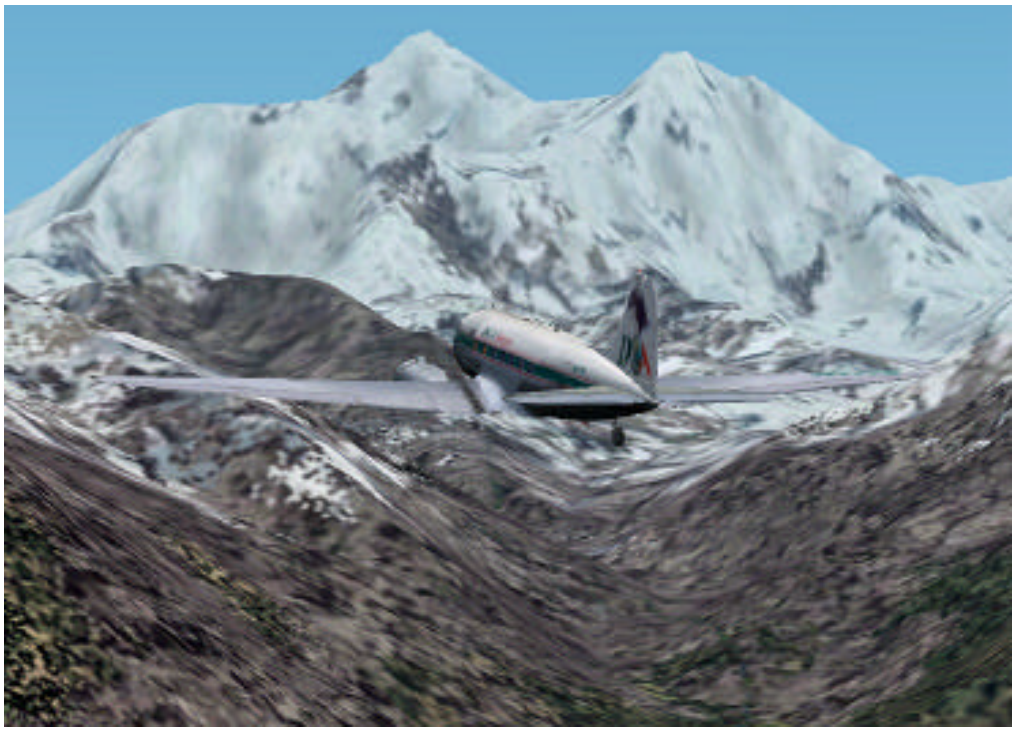
Above, the VNLK grotto is seen (yellow arrow pointing to touchdown) ahead on the right. I'm around 4-5 nm from the runway.

Above, I'm 3 nm from VNLK, about 9,500 MSL

On final for VNLK. It's almost too late for a go around.

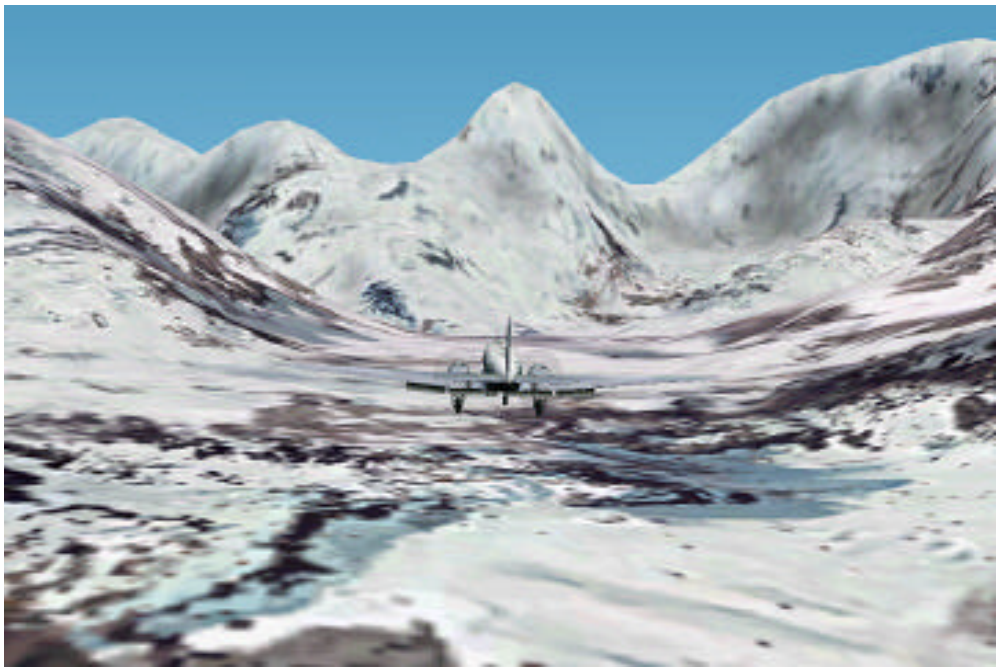
After another short field take off, we turn left and do a procedure turn to gain altitude before heading north to Everest. Finally, we're on our way to the Base Camp and I'm around 10,000 MSL. We're struggling for altitude, need to get to about 17,000 MSL or more. Don't forget to lean out those engines or you may not make it.

Watch the throttles and mixture controls. They are really touchy up here. Don't bring the throttles back to full idle after landing, leave a little power on to keep the engines from dying.



The best place to put it down is 3 to 4 nm past Base camp (Fix 11). Landing near the Base Camp puts you on a steep slope uphill. If you land on that upslope, you'll begin an uncontrolled slide backward down the slope. Three miles past Base Camp, the altitude for landing is about 16,500 MSL.

The screen shot above is abeam Base Camp (Fix 11) at 17,000 MSL. The potential landing spot is identified by the red arrow.



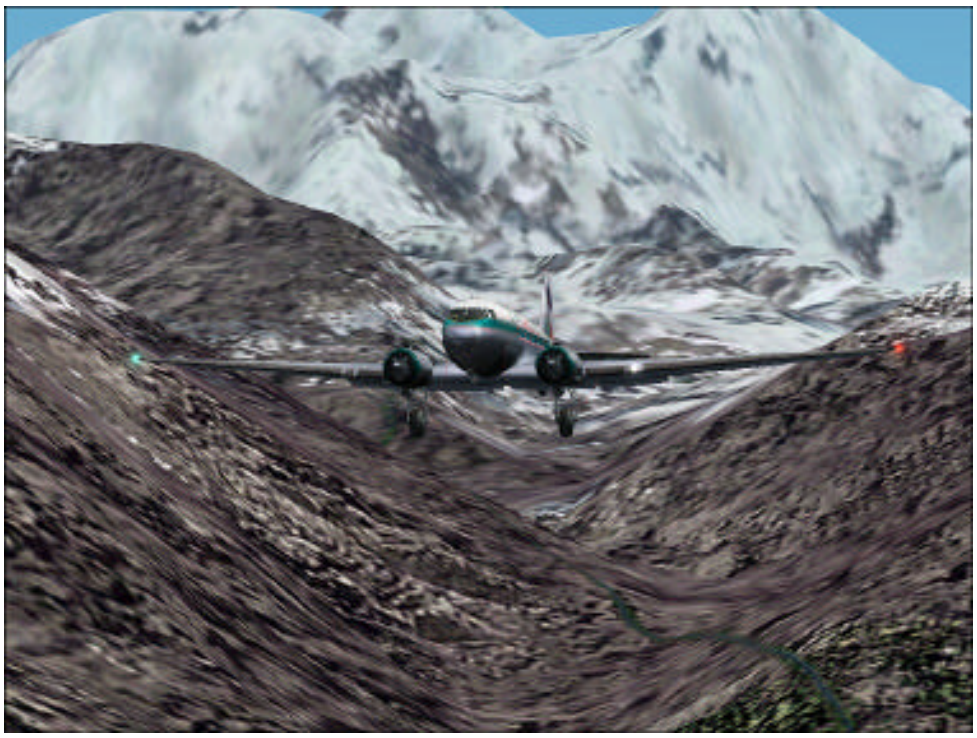
Here, I'm about a mile from touchdown.

I managed to put it on the ground, glacier that is -- at an elevation of about 16,500 MSL.

Here we are, off loading all the runners and equipment. Now it's time to get this bird off the glacier.

Just starting the takeoff roll.

I've lifted off the glacier. Time to set up for the downhill run.



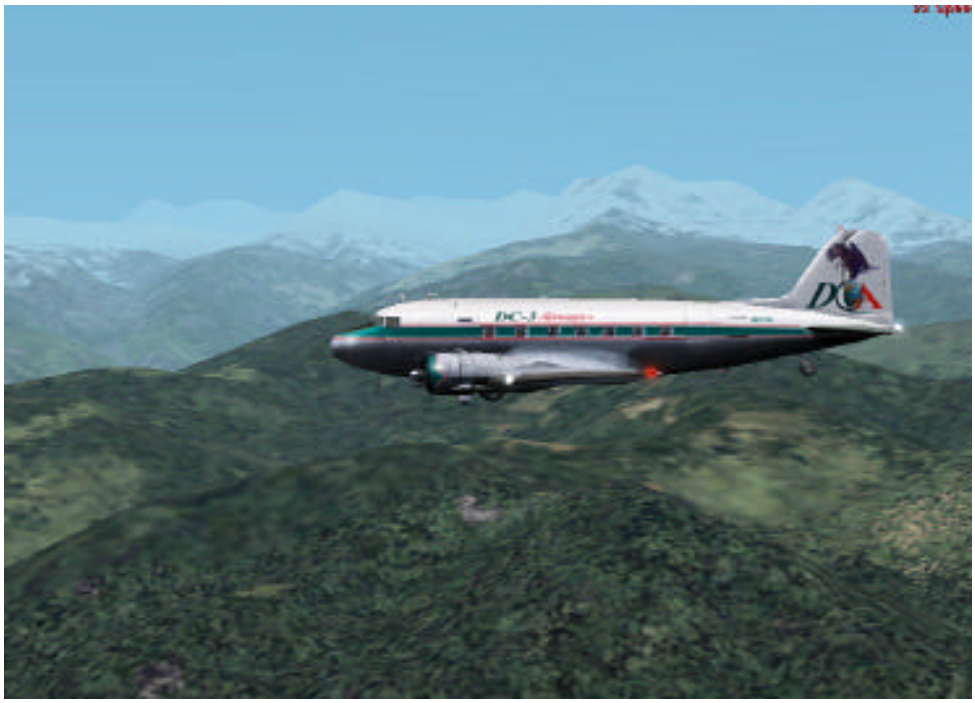
With the Base Camp behind us, I leave 1/4 flaps and the gear down, in the words of the authors, "to ride the downhill slope" to the next landing.

Remember that we have another landing at the Hole in the Wall -- VNLK. I'll skip more screen shots of that one.

On the way home, we have a landing on another plateau. This time at Rumjatar, Nepal (VNRT), an 1,800 foot runway at an elevation of 4,500 MSL.

I'm on course and the runway is up the valley to the right -- indicated by the yellow arrow.

The yellow arrow points to the approach end of the runway. I'm at about 4,800 MSL, 2 nm from touchdown.



Whew! Airborne on the final leg back to Kathmandu, Nepal (VNKT). I'm level at 12,500 MSL in order to get over the mountains between me and the last destination.

It's been a great ride. Thanks to Ron Bushell and Norman Hancock for putting this beautiful and challenging series of flights together.

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