

# THEY WENT FOR A RIDE IN A TIGER

## How the Golden Fleeces Came to Kansu

Special to "The Listener" by MAX BICKERTON, acting-executive-Secretary to the International Committee for Chinese Industrial Co-operatives, Shanghai.

READERS of *The Listener* will be interested to hear details of the unique journey of the 25 New Zealand Corriedale sheep which left Auckland on the UNRRA ship *Lindenwood Victory* on February 27, 1947, for Rewi Alley's Bailie School, Shantan, Kansu, China. In contrast to the primitive means of transport of the 1941 flock, they travelled de luxe. No VIP could have had a higher priority than these dyed-in-the-wool aristocrats; and they made the journey in record time—25 days from Auckland to Shantan.

A week before the arrival of the sheep in Shanghai, Colin Morrison (Dominion Secretary of CORSO) called on me and we began a round of visits to negotiate transport for the last laps of the journey. The first calls were not hopeful, but when we reached Major Thorpe, the UNRRA Supplies Officer, the story caught his imagination and he immediately telephoned the office of General Chennault's CNRRA Air Transport (CAT).

"You boys are always telling me how you flew mules in over the Hump, here's a job that's right up your alley. . . ."

But even with Major Thorpe's co-operation it was not easy. Kansu was not an occupied area and so was outside of CNRRA operations. The expense was too great. There was no fuel in Sian. The sheep might not stand the high altitude at which it was necessary to fly over the mountains. The acid in their urine would rust the metal of the plane and they might break the windows!

### Triumph of Diplomacy

Colin Morrison's diplomacy, his stressing that the eyes of New Zealand were on these sheep, and the sympathy of C. M. Li, Deputy Director of CNRRA, swept aside all of these objections and the good news came through that CAT would put at our disposal a C.47 for the

1190-mile journey from Shanghai to Lanchow.

The *Lindenwood Victory* made the hot journey from Auckland to Shanghai in 14 days, arriving on the first spring day of the year. When we were shown over it the next day by Dr. Johnson, the chief veterinary surgeon, it was a revelation to see the care that had been given to our 25, and the other thousand UNRRA sheep and 300 cattle. Through the tropics the sea temperature had been 90deg., and in the holds, in spite of electric fans, the temperature had been as high as 110deg., but we found the 22 ewes and three magnificent rams in excellent condition. Elaborate patent foods had been loaded for them, but the sheep with their incredibly thick fleece, had felt the heat and had only licked a little rock salt, drunk plenty of water and chewed a little hay. On the wharf we watched with admiration the skill and tact with which H. Sievwright, of the New Zealand Department of Agriculture, persuaded the sheep into the trucks that were to take them to the CNRRA feeding station.

### Exemplary Passengers

The next time I saw them was at dawn on March 22 when they were loaded into the silver plane with its yellow tiger emblem. Captain Rousselot and his co-pilot Mr. Chu were obviously impressed with their passengers. After flashlight pictures had been taken we started on our journey. Touching down at Hankow for refuelling after three hours' flight, we then steered a direct course for Lanchow, which we reached in just under another five hours. The sheep were exemplary passengers. Nuzzling together, steaming, palpitating

in four pens made of bamboo poles banked with bales of hay, whenever the journey got a little bumpy, they just looked at me with patient eyes and chewed off another wisp of hay. I wanted to convey to them the historic nature of their flight and describe some of the beauty of the rugged country over which we were passing, but I was not successful.

The transport section of the Shantan School was waiting at Lanchow airfield with a truck. Unlike the Young Lady of Niger,

these sheep were safely disgorged, and with a smile on the face of this Flying Tiger—a smile of satisfaction at a job well done. The tarpaulin and straw which had been spread on the floor of the 'plane were quickly removed and within half-an-hour the return cargo of pigs' bristles was loaded. The 'plane had not been damaged or dirtied in any way.

The sheep were housed in the Lanchow Bailie School and visited by a procession of students far into the night.

### In Alexander's Footsteps

Next day we set out on the last 279-mile lap of the journey, along the old Silk Road to Shantan. In the truck the sheep had a better opportunity of seeing their new surroundings. Following first the Yellow River, the road then climbed over a 10,000-foot pass to descend into semi-desert steppe. Alexander is reputed to have taken this road and Genghis Khan certainly did.

This is loess country of incredible poverty. In the bitter winters the small

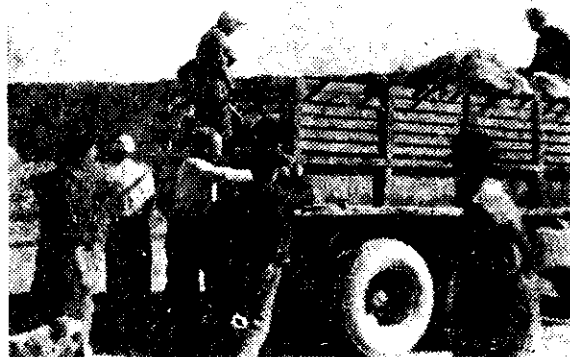
children are naked from the waist downwards. At one halt they crowded round the truck, burrowing their chapped hands deep into the thick wool of the sheep, and asking questions. Where did the sheep come from? New Zealand. How did they come? By 'plane. Did they sit in the seats? It all seemed a fairy tale to them.

At intervals we passed loess ruins of the five beacons, the watch tower and the temple, which were erected thousands of years ago to warn the Han people of Mongol invasions and which still form a regular feature of the landscape all the way through Kansu and Sinkiang. We passed camel caravans, and trucks loaded with oil from Tiwa and grazing flocks of lank Kansu sheep whose stock our sheep were to improve. At one place the motor road broke impudently through the Great Wall, but the Great Wall in these parts is not a thing of grandeur, but just a pile of crumbling loess bricks. This history-stained country must have smelled quite

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CORRIE DALES for Rewi Alley being loaded in a "Flying Tiger" transport plane at Shanghai. In the centre (in grey jersey) is H. M. Sievwright, of the Department of Agriculture, who brought the sheep to China.



REWI ALLEY (left) watches the unloading of the sheep at Shantan.



COLIN MORRISON (left) of CORSO, with Alley and his adopted sons.