I Shot Out Our Own Engine

By Cal Brown – CFC "Sister Sue" 395th Bomb Squadron

Our crew flew one of the old Y-B model B-29 from Pratt to Wichita. We picked up our brand new B-29 at the Boeing factory, flew it back to Pratt, prepared to land and the landing gear would not come down. The gunnery crew went into the bomb bay and cranked the gear down and we landed safely. The only gunnery practice we had before we left for India was a camera mission and an air to ground familiarization mission. Capt. Turner would roll the plane up and we would shoot at the ground just to see if the guns would work. That was our gunnery training.

After arriving in India "SISTER SUE" needed an engine change. That meant it would have to be slowed timed or broken in, like an old Model A engine. Along with slow time mission we were assigned a gunnery familiarization mission. To test and fire the guns.

In India the enlisted men were allowed a beer ration of one case of beer a month. There was no refrigeration or ice to cool the beer so on a non-combative mission there was usually a few cases of beer in the bomb bay. Even in India it is cold at altitude.

We took off and climbed to our assigned altitude. Lt. Clark Rauth, our engineer, set up the slow time procedure for the new engine. Capt. Ernest Turner called me on the intercom and said "Brown test the guns." I called our Bombardier, Lt. Tom Sample, to power up the upper forward turret and we could start with that one. From my position on top of the plane, Sample or I could control that upper forward turret. That was primarily the Bombardiers turret except when we were on a bomb run, then I would take control of it. The gun site in the nose was pointed forward as were the guns in a stowed position. After the system was powered up, Sample closed the action switch on his gun site, the guns harmonized with his site and he pulled the trigger, nothing happened. He said "Brown these guns won't fire, what's the problem?" I said "give the turret to me and I'll see if they will fire from my gun site." Sample turned his control off and I turned my on and I had control of the turret. My gun site was pointed at about 10 o'clock high. When I closed my action switch, the guns harmonized with my site, I pulled the trigger and they worked fine. I told Sample to try again from his site. It was still pointed forward so the guns harmonized with his site and would not fire. I told him to give the turret back to me. I closed my action switch, the guns harmonized with my site, I pulled the trigger and lowered my site and swung to the left and put three rounds in number 1 engine. One round went though the prop blade. Capt. Turner said "CEASE FIRE, CEASE FIRE." Oil came streaming up and over the wing and the prop was

feathered and we came down and landed. Col. Lucas met us when we landed and said “who is the central fire control man on this crew?” Very timidly I said “I am sir.” He said “what happened”, I said “I don’t know but I intend to find out.” Col Lucas said “when you do I want a full report.” I said “Yes sir.”

We tore into the turret and found the fire interrupter, which we called a “gallon bucket”, which was a sleeve with raised cams mounted on it to resemble the outline of the plane. Whenever the guns were pointed at any part of the plane, micro switches would ride up into these cams and cut the firing circuit to the guns. In our upper forward turret this sleeve was installed backwards at the factory. Meaning that when Sample tried to fire forward, the tail was out in front of the plane. Had the guns been pointed aft, he could have shot the tail off. I reported this to Col. Lucas. All the planes in the Group were grounded and we heard that there were three planes that had the same problem.

Luckily we were up long enough to cool the beer.