



Date of event: 19 August, 1944

Date written: Ernest Turner, September, 1944; Robert Mullin, 11 December, 1989;
Calvin Brown, 6 February, 1990

Written by: Ernest Turner, Robert Mullin, Calvin Brown

Editor's Introduction: On 19 August, 1944, a B-29 piloted by Ernest Turner returning to India from China had one of the most violent weather-related encounters ever sustained by a B-29 whose crew survived to tell about it. An Aviation Information Directive (#16) was issued on the experience to provide all B-29 pilots with information to help them improve their knowledge and skill in flying B-29s.

VIOLENT WEATHER -- NO B-29 HAD IT WORSE THAN ON THIS HUMP FLIGHT

Ernest Turner's Story: The flight was uneventful until we reached the vicinity of Imphal where a line of storms was encountered which could not be evaded.

We started our descent from 18,000 feet about 0900Z and broke into the clear at about 15,000 feet. Ahead there seemed to be a front with a stratus layer above and below the altitude of the plane. We entered a stratus layer on instruments and hit a cumulus thunderhead at 10,600 feet. Moderate turbulence increased abruptly to severe turbulence with sudden up and down drafts. Both myself and the co-pilot were on the controls.

We went through four very severe ascents and descents; on the fourth ascent the plane started an uncontrollable climb. We couldn't read any of the instruments as the dials were all spinning crazily, but I could see that the nose oil pressure dropped to 0-5 lbs. trying to govern the RPE. At the start of this climb, the engines were running at 1800 RPM and were pulling 23 inches.

The plane climbed vertically, was flipped over on its back, and then slid off on the left wing. After flipping over on the left wing, the plane went into a dive. My head was leaning against the armor glass due to the angle of dive. Dust settling back on the floor got into my eyes. Being strapped in had helped in regaining control of the plane as it rolled out of the loop. We finally brought the plane out of the dive at approximately 3,000 feet with engine operation normal. The first indicated airspeed which had been readable was 380 mph; this dropped to 320 mph at the end of the dive.

The plane was brought down slowly to 500 feet to avoid turbulence and we came into a normal landing with a gross weight of 106,370.

No apparent structural damage was found on immediate inspection, though we felt that the strains imposed might have resulted in damage not visible to superficial examination.

Robert Mullin's Story: (Note: While Bob Mullin's writing this for "MEMORIES" is recorded as having been written 11 December, 1989, he notes that he put down his own personal recollections of the flight immediately after the war).

When I was asked to put down my recollections of this event for "MEMORIES," the question was put to me, "Do you remember this event?" I can only say indeed I do! In fact, I haven't been the same since. Col. Ernest Turner, USAF (Ret.) passed away in March, 1989. We were friends and I miss him. He was a quiet member of the 40th and an excellent pilot.

We took off from Hsinching about 1100 hours. It was a fine August day and conditions were CAVU as we headed back to Chakulia.

The first tremendous down draft threw me clear out of my seat onto the floor. As I struggled to get up, the aircraft was caught in a violent vertical current that tossed us upward. The only thing for me to hold on to was the leg of my navigator's table. (Remember, our early airplanes had a two gun upper forward turret and the navigator's table had a leg). I wound my legs around the leg of the table and just held on. I glanced up toward the nose and could see the Bombardier, Thomas E. Sample, bouncing around like a football. I could see our Radioman, "Pop" Gardner, was worse off than I. Having no table leg to hang on to, he was flat on his back and, with both hands, was warding off a fire extinguisher that had broken loose from its fastenings. It was suspended in mid-air and was slowly spinning around as the airplane went through its violent gyrations. It was amazing that when all of this was over, we were still very close to the proper heading. The inside of the airplane was in shambles, equipment had torn loose, floor boards had dislodged and the contents of the relief can were everywhere. Somehow our flight engineer, Clark Rauth, had kept the engines running and everything was in the green. The crew in the back -- Rogers, Urban, Evans, McCarthy, and Brown must have had a time. They were awfully good people and it didn't seem to bother them too much.

In my mind this incident certainly confirmed that the B-29 was one fine aircraft and that the 40th Group was blessed with some fine airmen.

Calvin Brown's Story: To start the story, when we left India to fly the Hump, we forgot to take along our portable toilet, which was no big deal until the return trip when our right gunner Bill Rogers had to answer nature's call, but no toilet. Bill borrowed Theodore Urban's (left gunner) cigarette lighter and melted the wax on the end of a "C" ration box and removed the contents, answered nature's call, and very carefully resealed that box and laid it aside for the rest of the trip.

I was riding the barber chair and watching the top of the airplane and maybe dozing off now and then. I could see a huge cloud ahead of us which didn't look any different from many we had flown through in the past.

We flew into it and it wasn't long until I saw lightning jumping all over the airplane, from tail to wingtips to nose to every part of the plane. I was fully awake by then.

All of a sudden, I was pushed down into the barber chair so hard I couldn't move. The next thing I knew, I was out of my chair trying to get into my chute while floating in mid-air along with everything else in the gunner's compartment. Then I hit the floor and couldn't move. The next sensation was floating in mid-air again and hitting the top of the plane and my gunsight then down to the floor again. I know what it feels like to be weightless.

Rogers and Urban were in their side gunners' seats with their seat belts on so they stayed in place.

After we pulled out and things seemed to be back to normal, I looked out a side blister. We were pretty close to the ground and it was raining.

Someone up front told us our compasses were all out of whack and that we had first gone up and then down and then up again and over on our back, upside down. We then went into a nose dive straight down. If I remember right, Bill Johnson, co-pilot, said we went into that cloud at 11,000 feet and came out at 3,000 feet thanks to the powered trim tabs, because he and Capt. Turner couldn't budge the yoke to pull us out of the dive.

It seems to me, because the compasses were all out of whack, we got back to Chakulia by radio contact.

When we landed and parked by the operations tent, the operations officer met us and when Capt. Turner told him what had happened, he said, "You guys need a drink." He took us in a tent and brought out a jug of whiskey. One drink a piece and that jug was gone.

Later, we looked that plane over from stem to stern and never did find that "C" ration box.

Editorial Note: The following accounts were published in MEMORIES Issue #41 as an addendum to this story.

William R. Johnson tells his story: As the plane went inverted, our engines stopped. Having never heard of a B-29 in this position, I expected the wings to snap off. They didn't! Our next thought was to avert a spin and restart the engines. We pulled back on the control column to get the nose down to regain flying speed and used rudder control to stop the spin tendency. We finally brought the plane out of the dive by using the trim tab control only, because the two of us did not have strength enough to pull the control column back. The air speed indicator passed the red line, and we were pulling too many G's to even rise from our seats. The plane was brought down to 500 feet to avoid turbulence. We flew all the way back to Chakulia at this altitude to stay below the overcast. To a man, we kissed the ground when we landed and gave thanks to our Maker on this day.

Paul Evans gives his account: I was in the tail gunner's compartment when the event happened. It all happened so quickly after entering the cumulus clouds. There were the quick ascents and descents; then the plane went into a steep dive. Thinking we were going to crash, I had "bail out" on my mind. I tried to reach for the tail gunner's escape hatch handle to be prepared to exit; however, I was immobile in my seat due to the quick upward and downward movements of the aircraft since we apparently entered the thunderhead. I was unable to move because the plane was in such a fast descent or dive. Finally, Captain Turner indicated over the interphone that the aircraft was under control. After landing at Chakulia, the pilot and copilot indicated that it took both of them to pull the aircraft out of the dive. Being in the tail compartment during emergencies is a lonely feeling.

Editor's Epilogue: Records show the following to have been on Ernest Turner's crew. It cannot be confirmed that everyone on this list was on this flight. Thomas Sample is not on our roster of living or deceased members, our having been unable to locate him. Clark Rauth and Elwyn Gardner were killed in a bailout of Plane #342 "Sister Sue" near our base at Hsinching, China, 16 October, 1944.

Ernest Turner- P (Deceased)
William Johnson – CP
Robert Mullin – N
Thomas Sample – B
Clark Rauth - FE (Deceased KIA 10.16.44)

Calvin Brown - CFC
Elwyn Gardner - (Deceased KIA 10.16.44)
Walther McCarthy- (Deceased)
Earl Rogers - G (Deceased)
Theodore Urban - G
Paul Evans - G

Date of Event: Friday, 19 October, 1945
Date Written: 8 July, 1982
Written by: Robert M. Freeborn

Editor's Introduction: The first and last activities of the 40th are appropriate to record for history. Bob Freeborn had the lonely job of being the last man in the 40th to leave the Group's facility on Tinian. Bob had joined the 44th Squadron in July, 1945 as a 20-year-old pilot (B-29 co-pilot).

WHEN THE LAST LIGHTS OF THE 40TH WERE TURNED OFF ON TINIAN

Bob Freeborn's Story: The Japanese surrendered on 15 August. September 2nd was V-J Day, with all flyable B-29s taking part in the fly-over as the surrender document was signed in Tokyo Bay aboard the battleship Missouri.

Following the surrender, there were a few POW missions and some other official flights, but the 40th Group was rapidly demobilized. Flight personnel with ten or more missions were rotated back to the States. Ground personnel, with a sufficient accumulation of "points" were similarly returned home. Other members of the unit were reassigned to other organizations that were destined to continue to remain operational. Each day saw more personnel from the 40th leave.

On October 5th, Tinian was swept by a typhoon which did a considerable amount of damage. At times, winds were in excess of 100 mph and the island was inundated by the downpour. By 15 October, much of the equipment of the 40th had been transferred out or reassigned. It was on that day, a Sunday, that a Major Evans called me into his office and informed me that I was to be the Liaison Officer. The Liaison Officer was charged with the duty and responsibility of closing out the 40th. I was given certain specific tasks and supervisory duties and a jeep. During the next few days, I inspected the line, signed releases and documents confirming the transfer and reassignment of various pieces of equipment, supervised clean-up operations and made several journeys to the Port of Tinian.

On Friday, 19 October, the final transfer of equipment, material and personnel was accomplished. The Liaison Officer's orders called for me to report to the 313th Wing on Saturday. On the 19th, I spent a very lonely evening in an area that had been home for the men of the 40th Group on Tinian. What was once a lively and bustling community was now a ghost town. I spent a solitary and depressing night. I arose very early the next morning, made a final check to be sure that the water and the electrical power was shut off and that everything was secure. Then I loaded my personal gear into the jeep and completed the transfer, relinquishing my official duty as Liaison Officer and my jeep.

I revisited the area and the field several times during the following three months. There was a small caretaker group that maintained security, but the 40th was gone.



40th Bomb Group Association
517½ Ridge Road, Wilmette, IL 60091