

"Little Boy" exploded at the preset altitude of 1,890 feet above the ground, but Bob Caron in the tail was the only one aboard our plane to see the incredible fireball that, in its atom-splitting fury, was a boiling furnace with an inner temperature calculated to be one hundred million degrees Fahrenheit.

Caron, looking directly at the flash through glasses so dense that the sun penetrated but faintly, thought for a moment that he must have been blinded. Ferebee, without glasses but facing in the opposite direction from a relatively exposed position, felt as if a giant flashbulb had gone off a few feet from his face.

I continued my course from the target, awaiting the shock wave, which required almost a minute to reach us. We were racing eastward away from Hiroshima, as was Chuck Sweeney in *The Great Artiste*. Sweeney had made a similar 155 degree turn, but to the left, as soon as he had dropped the instrument packages. Because his plane was charged with the photographic assignment, Marquardt had lagged behind, with movie and still cameras poised to make a record on film of the historic scene.

We must have been 9 miles from the point of the explosion when the shock wave reached us. This was the moment for which we had been bracing ourselves. Would the plane withstand the blow? The scientists were confident that it would, yet they admitted there were some aspects of the nuclear weapon's behavior about which they were not quite certain.

Caron, the only man aboard the plane with an immediate view of the awesome havoc we had created, tried to describe it to us. Suddenly he saw the shock wave approaching at the speed of sound—almost 1,100 feet a second. Condensing moisture from the heated air at the leading edge of the shock wave made it quite visible, just as one sees shimmering air rising from the ground on a hot, humid day.

Before Caron could warn us to brace ourselves, the wave struck the plane with violent force. Our B-29 trembled under the impact and I gripped the controls tightly to keep us in level flight. From my experience of flying through enemy flak over targets in Europe and Africa, I found the effect to be much like that produced by an anti-aircraft shell exploding near the plane.

In fact, that's what Deak Parsons first thought had happened. "It's flak," he shouted, then realized like the rest of us that it was the result we had been told to expect. At a news conference next

day, Bob Lewis told reporters that it felt as if some giant had struck the plane with a telephone pole. Soon after the first shock, a second struck us. It was of lesser impact, caused by what the scientists described as "an echo effect."

Now that I knew we were safe from the effects of the blast, I began circling so that we could view the results. For the record, I announced over the intercom, "Fellows, you have just dropped the first atomic bomb in history."

Caron had been trying to describe what he saw, meanwhile using a hand-held K-20 aerial camera to photograph the scene. He was not a professional photographer and only a few of his pictures proved useful. But many excellent shots were obtained from the photo plane that accompanied us.

Although Caron had told of a mushroom-shaped cloud, and said that it seemed to be "coming toward us," we were not prepared for the awesome sight that met our eyes as we turned for a heading that would take us alongside the burning, devastated city.

The giant purple mushroom, which the tail-gunner had described, had already risen to a height of 45,000 feet. 3 miles above our own altitude, and was still boiling upward like something terribly alive. It was a frightening sight, and even though we were several miles away, it gave the appearance of something that was about to engulf us.

Even more fearsome was the sight on the ground below. At the base of the cloud, fires were springing up everywhere amid a turbulent mass of smoke that had the appearance of bubbling hot tar. If Dante had been with us in the plane, he would have been terrified! The city we had seen so clearly in the sunlight a few minutes before was now an ugly smudge. It had completely disappeared under this awful blanket of smoke and fire.

A feeling of shock and horror swept over all of us.

"My God!" Lewis wrote as the final entry in his log.

He was later quoted as having said. "My God, what have we done?" These words were put in my mouth by the authors of the movie script for *Above and Beyond*.

Whatever exclamations may have passed our lips at this historic moment, I cannot accurately remember. We were all appalled and what we said was certain to have reflected our emotions and our disbelief.

It is unfortunate that there is no way to reconstruct, with

complete accuracy, the excitement that seized all of us aboard the *Enola Gay*. At my instructions, Jake Beser had used a wire recorder to make a record of everything said aboard the plane during the bomb run, and comments from all crew members after the bomb drop. He turned the spool of recording wire over to an information officer upon our return to Tinian, and it has never been heard of since.

As we viewed the awesome spectacle below, we were sobered by the knowledge that the world would never be the same. War, the scourge of the human race since time began, now held terrors beyond belief. I reflected to myself that the kind of war in which I was engaged over Europe in 1942 was now outdated.

But as I swung southward on the return flight to our base, the feeling of tenseness gave way to one of relief. Our mission, for which we had practiced diligently for so long, had been successful. All doubts about the mystery weapon had been removed.

"I think this is the end of the war," I said to Bob Lewis as I tamped the tobacco in my pipe bowl and lighted it up once more.

I jotted down a few words on a note pad, tore off the sheet, and handed it to Dick Nelson for radio transmission back to headquarters. In previously agreed-upon phrases, it simply advised that the primary target had been bombed visually with good results and that there had been no fighter opposition or anti-aircraft fire.

Meanwhile Captain Parsons was preparing his own report, containing more detail even though quite brief. Transmitted in code, his message said: "82 V 670. Able, Line 1, Line 2, Line 6, Line 9."

General Farrell, on Tinian, translated it for members of his staff and the scientists who surrounded him: "Clear cut, successful in all respects. Visual effects greater than Trinity. Hiroshima. Conditions normal in airplane following delivery. Proceeding to regular base."

The message was all Farrell needed in order to pass the momentous word along to an anxiously awaiting General Groves and his staff in the Pentagon. A few hours later, while lunching with a group of enlisted men aboard the cruiser U.S.S. *Augusta* on the way home from the Potsdam conference, President Truman got the news and exclaimed, "This is the greatest thing in history."

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