



Tragic Loss of Ed Hornyia Over Formosa (Taiwan)

Editor's Introduction: This is the story of the tragic loss of gunner Edward Hornyia on the mission to Takao on 17 October, 1944. The special circumstances of Ed Hornyia's loss and the events surrounding this mission by *Monsoon Minnie* warrant telling in MEMORIES. Carter McGregor's book, *Kagu-Tsuchi Bomb Group*, devotes a chapter to this mission. This account borrows extensively from Carter's book. Other members of the crew have contributed significant vignettes to complete the story.

Date of event: 17 October 1944

Date written: 1981 (Carter McGregor). Winter of 1994 for other contributors.

Written by: Carter McGregor, Ralph Weinberg, Robert Moss, Ed Haggerty, Fritz Kulicka

Crew of *Monsoon Minnie* for this mission:

AC:	Robert Moss
Co-pilot:	Carter McGregor
Bombardier:	Fritz Kulicka
Navigator:	Ralph Weinberg
Flight Engineer:	Edward Haggerty
Radio Operator:	Royal Klaver
CFC Gunner:	Not Known
Right Gunner:	Edward Hornyia
Left Gunner:	Not Known
Tail Gunner:	Joseph Duemig

Carter McGregor, in his book, tells the story: On 17 October 1944, briefing was at 05:00, so after a decent breakfast of fresh eggs, we headed for the briefing hut, curious to know where we were going this time. When the Intelligence Officer pulled the covering off the big wall map, there was the island of Formosa with the harbor installation at Takao outlined in red. The briefing officer said that we were to bomb the harbor and dock facilities in order to assist in the Philippine invasion.

I was daydreaming about how much better off we were than the GI's and the Marines until the briefing officer got my attention, saying that the Japs were very proud of Formosa, so there would be heavy anti-aircraft fire, and near Takao was a major base for fighters. This trip might prove to be more interesting than I wanted it to be, but I didn't know what to do about it except go and sweat.

The takeoff went smoothly, with the usual goose bumps that were a part of a heavy takeoff. I didn't know whether I said it or one of the other crew members did, but someone muttered over the intercom, "Come on *Minnie*," as the four big engines were turning out 8,800 horses to get *Minnie* off the ground--the moment of truth when everything had to go just right to get enough flying speed to lift 70 tons of metal, bombs, gas, and men into the air. I couldn't help but think what a mess that would make, not only of us but of the coolies still lining the runway, if our big plane were to fail to make it off. The bombs still had the pins in the fuses, but there had been cases when pinned bombs had been known to explode from a crash or a fire, and ten tons of high explosives and 6,700 gallons of high octane would make one giant firecracker.

Our route was east to the China Coast, each airplane going individually. The section of China over which we were to fly was occupied by the Japanese, so our gunners had to stay on the alert for China-based Jap fighters who might want to come up and say "hello." As usual, we did not climb to our bombing altitude right after takeoff but stayed at a lower altitude to save gasoline. We avoided the coastal installations and larger cities where there were known anti-aircraft batteries. There was no use asking for more flak than we knew we were going to get anyhow.

Later, some of the other ships reported fighter passes over China, but even though our gunners had test fired their guns and were ready to greet any visitors, we didn't have any come to us. On this trip, we had a replacement gunner in the right blister, Sgt. Edward Hornyia, since our regular right gunner was too sick to make the mission. Sgt. Hornyia had never flown with us before, but our men knew him and said that he was a good man.

We cruised on over the Yellow Sea, climbing to altitude, and the navigator was busy with position and winds aloft to get us to the assembly point right on time. We were to assemble off the coast of Formosa, and then go over the island in formation, drop our bombs on the harbor installations, break off back over the water and head for home. With that plan, we would be over the anti-aircraft fire for a minimum of exposure.

When we arrived at the assembly, the leader was already circling, with some other ships joining on his wing. It was to be a ten-ship formation, and we were to be on the right wing of the right element leader. The lead element was a four-ship formation, and each of the others had three ships apiece, a very good defensive formation. While we were circling, but before we completed the formation, was a very vulnerable time for us to be hit by fighters. I didn't need to call the gunners and tell them to be on the alert; they were ready. As was our habit, everyone had strapped on his chute when we started to climb and had checked all his survival gear. It was miserably uncomfortable to wear a Mae West parachute, survival vest, canteen, and pistol, but if we needed any of that, it would be better to be uncomfortable and still have it than suddenly realize it was somewhere in the airplane. One of the two pilots and one gunner in the rear compartment were to wear oxygen masks anytime we were pressurized and nearing the target. The tail gunner, alone in his cubbyhole, was always to wear his mask at altitude. If we had a sudden decompression, then at least one would be available to help the others, if they needed it.

Since we were on the right side of the formation, Moss, the pilot in the left seat, would have to do most of the formation flying. He hooked up his oxygen mask, but mine was just hanging where it would be handy.

The formation headed out, right on time, and everyone had "tucked" in real tight, but still we had not seen any fighters. As we turned from the Initial Point, we could see flak ahead, aimed at the formation already close to the target. The briefing officer had been right. The Japs were proud of Formosa, and the flak gunners were doing their thing. The flak bursts were black so they were too far off to do any damage, but if the bursts started turning orange and we could hear the "thump, thump," it was hard on our nervous systems.

Still no fighters, and we couldn't understand why, but we were grateful for small favors. The flak was thick and accurate as we approached the target, and at least now we knew the fighters might not hit for a few minutes since they generally stayed out of their own anti-aircraft areas.

Our bombardier was watching for fighters and at the same time following the target in his bombsight. We were all to drop on the leader, but each bombardier was also supposed to follow through on the aiming just in case something happened to the lead ship. Fritz said, "Something is wrong--we are way off target." Just then the radio operator, Sgt. Klaver, said he picked up a message from the lead airplane that it was a bad run so the formation would stay together, go out and make a big circle, and come back in from the other direction. I wondered if we could put in for double combat pay for having to do this twice.

Sgt. Hornyia, the right gunner, reported that he could see the airfield in the distance, and there were a good many fighters taking off and climbing to our altitude. I knew that they would get there just about the same time we returned, for it takes time and a lot of space to turn a ten-ship formation of B-29's, so our greeting committee would be on hand.

It seemed like an eternity before we made the 180-degree turn and headed back for the target. We could see that the other formations had already hit the target and headed for home. I was ready for us to do the same.

The lead ship started to open the bomb bay doors, so Kulicka hit his switch to open ours. I could hear the rush of the air as the doors were coming open. Fritz had already given to me the toggle switch extension to salvo the load on the leader and had set all his switches and had everything cranked into the bombsight, so now he was watching for fighters but also had one hand on his drop switch. All I had to do was watch the lead airplane, and as soon as I saw the first bomb come out, I would hit my toggle switch to salvo our load at the same time. With the formation on the other side and Moss having to do all the flying, all I could do was sit and watch.

"Bombs away," and *Monsoon Minnie* jumped from the released weight of our load. The flak was thick and heavy, and I heard myself muttering to the lead airplane, "Make your turn and let's get the hell out of here." At the same time I saw Fritz reach for the switch to close our own doors.

The leader had just started his turn when the Nipponese greeters arrived on the scene, and every gunner started calling fighter positions. Moss was still busy, flying the formation, but I could see those nasty little Zekes coming from all directions. The best way to spot them at a distance was by their vapor trails, and then when they would get a little closer you could see the leading edges start blinking, and you knew their calling cards were on the way.

Suddenly, there was an explosion, and the interior of the plane filled with fog. I didn't know what the noise was, but I knew that we had taken some kind of hit and had depressurized, causing the warm air inside the airplane to vaporize. For a few seconds, the fog was too thick to see anything, but I yelled for everyone to get on a mask at the same time I was grabbing for mine and hooking it to my helmet. We knew from past experience that if the hole in the plane was not too big, we could put something over it--a magazine, a cushion, anything that would cover the space and then the pressure would build back quickly, so I wanted everyone to look for holes.

At the same instant, Weinberg said, "I'm hit," and Sgt. Klaver said, "I'm hit too, but I can't tell how bad."

Right at that moment, there was nothing I could do for either of them until we got out of that hornet's nest, for the fighters were still pouring it on, and every turret on our ship was in action. I looked around me to see if we had any holes in the front end, and I just happened to look up, right over my seat, and saw blue sky through a hole about four inches in diameter, just above my head. I turned to see where the shell had hit, and there was a big scar on the armor plate behind my seat, about six inches behind me. Later, we surmised that when the 20mm shell hit the armor plate, the bullet shattered, and the fragments ricocheted back and hit the navigator and radio operator. I could not believe I was not hit too, but I couldn't feel anything hurting, although there was no way some of that shrapnel could have missed hitting me, somewhere.

One of the lower turrets was firing a steady stream, and I yelled at the gunners, "Fire bursts--get off the trigger of those guns."

The left gunner came back, "Captain, Hornyia had that turret."

"Well, tell him to quit firing it steady--fire bursts."

"Captain, I can't. He's gone."

"What do you mean, he's gone?"

"His blister must have blown, and he went out and took the sight with him, and he still had control of the turret."

The turret was still firing in a steady blast, so I said, "Hit his switch and take control of the turret and then see what has happened."

The tail gunner, Sgt. Joe Duemig, spoke up, "I saw him go out and watched his chute open, but some of the fighters left us and started making passes at him. I can still see him floating down."

We soon discovered that when Sgt. Hornyia was sucked out the opening, he knocked the gun sight off the pedestal, but the heavy electric cable that connected with the gun computers did not break, and the slip stream of the airplane was holding the sight against the side of the airplane, depressing the trigger. Obviously, the gunner did not have his seat belt fastened or he would never have been pulled out of the plane. In his excitement about the fighters, he had unfastened his belt so that he could turn and fire more easily without being hindered.

The left gunner took control of the runaway turret, but we were still under heavy fighter attack. Bob Moss was getting pretty tired flying formation, so I took the controls to give him some relief. The formation was still in good shape, maybe even tucked in closer than before because when the fighters appeared, it just seemed a natural tendency to edge in closer to the next guy for mutual protection.

When we were pretty well out over the Yellow Sea, the fighters dropped off, deciding they were getting too far from home base. This gave us a chance to take stock of our injured and to determine the extent of damage to the plane. Weinberg and Klaver had both sustained wounds from the fragments, and while the injuries were painful and bleeding, they did not appear to be too serious. Each had been giving first aid to the other. We were not quite ready to let Kulicka go back and help them since we still might need him for nose gunner. It seemed as though the two wounded men could take care of each other for the time being.

Shorty Haggerty was checking all the systems on *Minnie* and found that there had been other damage, primarily electrical, to the airplane, but the engines were running fine. There was a bundle of cable that had been severed, and it was impossible to determine where all the wires were leading from that bundle, so we just had to hope that they were not vital to getting *Minnie* back to free China.

Moss and I decided that it would not be feasible to try to go all the way back to Hsinching, so we elected to try for an alternate field, a fighter base inside the Chinese lines. There we could better determine our damage as well as get our wounded to a doctor, so we notified the lead airplane that we were going to break off and head for Luichow.

Even though there was still the danger of China-based Zekes coming to intercept, Kulicka went back to the navigator's station and gave directions to us as to course and distance. Klaver was able to operate his radio key, so he told our base what we were doing and where we were going, as well as alerting the fighter base that we were on the way.

When we were ready to land, we had to sweat a little more, still wondering what all those wires were that had been cut. However, the gear and flaps came right on down just like they were supposed to, with no problem, and the landing was normal.

The ambulance met us to take our wounded, and an intelligence officer for that base was also on hand to get a full account of all that had happened. There was never any report on the fate of Sgt. Edward Hornyia; the last any of our crew had seen of him, he was floating down in his chute with the fighters making passes. We did not know whether he opened his chute or whether the force of being sucked out of the plane opened it, but in any event, his chances for survival were nonexistent. We had been about halfway between Formosa and the Chinese mainland over the Yellow Sea when the incident occurred; and although he was wearing a Mae West, to survive the initial attack, the fighter target shooting, and then land in the Yellow Sea would have been a miracle. He was simply listed as missing in action, one among thousands during the war who disappeared with no trace, who gave their all, their lives.

While it is impossible to minimize the tragedy of the loss of even one life, of far greater magnitude concerning the entire war effort was the evaluation of the strike photos on the Takao harbor and dock installations. Pictures taken at time of impact of the bombs showed that the entire formation dropped their bombs in the water, with no damage to harbor facilities. Some of the other formations had done a better job, hitting the target and thus materially assisting the forthcoming invasion of the Philippines; but as far as our ten ships were concerned, the entire mission was a fiasco. In war you expect losses, but you must anticipate results, and for this trip against the Japanese, the only accomplishment for our crew was tragedy for a young man whom I did not even know. Certainly this same circumstance happened on other missions, but we cannot forget that this man died a hero as much as did anyone, although his death will not be recorded in historical archives nor in the annals of war records and deeds.

Ralph Weinberg records his memories of the mission: On the return home, we were at least a mile behind on the left side of the formation. As a result, two Japanese planes didn't have to worry about anything but our own guns. I looked out my window and saw one airplane flying level with us and parallel, just out of the range of our guns.

Just as I figured out he must be transmitting information to an airplane above us, the shell came through the top of the plane and hit behind Carter McGregor. The concussion knocked Carter's helmet off and blew out the right gunner's blister. Royal Klaver was standing slightly behind the pilot's position, trying to see what was going on since, at his radio position, there was no outside view. As a result, he picked up quite a few shell fragments on his legs.

I was knocked off my seat by the concussion, and I picked up a shell fragment in my right foot and right calf. After a few minutes of recuperation from the shock, it was determined that we couldn't make it back to Chengtu with the oxygen and gas supply we had on board, so we were going ahead for the nearest American air base in unoccupied China.

I checked with the lead navigator of the formation to make sure that I had the right position before giving a heading for the base. About ten minutes before my ETA was up, Moss started circling. I asked what he thought he was doing; he said he was trying to do some dead reckoning or to pick up some checkpoints. Just about that time, two Black Widows from the base came up and escorted us back to the base.

After first aid from the flight surgeon at the base, Royal Klaver and I were lying under the wing of the plane while they were refueling it, and this jeep pulls up. A sharp-looking young lieutenant jumps out. He looks at me, says, "You're Weinberg, aren't you?" I said, "That's right." He said, "You don't remember me, but I have to salute you now." And he threw me a highball. He said, "I was in the first class of bombardiers sent to navigation school, and you were our head instructor. We thought you were the most iron-assed SOB that God ever sent to this earth. We all hated your guts, but I want to tell you, I thank you for what you did because you made it possible for me to perform my duties and stay alive up to this time." You know, that helped ease the discomfort quite a bit.

We then proceeded to Chengtu without any problems. Royal Klaver and I were taken to the base hospital where the shell fragments were removed from us. They kept me there for two months, the main reason being that the shell fragment that they took out of my foot had lodged in a particularly sensitive place, and if I had to bail out going back to India over the Hump, I wouldn't have been able to walk out. And as a result of favoring that foot (I used a crutch for quite a while), I threw my back out, so even when I got back to India, I spent ten days flat on my back.

Bob Moss recalls the explosion in the plane and the events that followed: Fighters attacked us as we turned back over the Straits of Formosa heading toward China. A tremendous "swoosh" scattered papers and other items as the aircraft, at that instant, lost cabin pressure. The crew in the back reported the side blister was gone and so was Sgt. Hornyia. A shell exploded over the co-pilot's position injuring Lt. Weinberg and Sgt. Klaver. Other damage to the plane involved the wiring in the bomb bay, the oxygen system, etc.

Because of the injured crew members and the damage to the aircraft, we decided to seek a suitable place for assistance. The Japanese had taken control of the eastern part of China so, after some consultation via radio, we decided to land at Luichow.

After landing we were told that the enemy was very close and that they would probably attack after seeing our aircraft. Hasty efforts were made to camouflage the plane and make repairs to both it and the injured crew members. This was done overnight which allowed us to depart the next morning and return to A-1.

Fritz Kulicka has vivid memories of the mission: There was that fighter about two o'clock high. He was looking us over when I gave him a short burst from our twin fifties. The tracers bounded off his aircraft, and he must have been displeased because he dipped his wings and came at us. I could see bright flashes coming from his guns so, apparently, we were shooting at each other. After a brief moment there was a loud explosion in our cockpit. Bob Moss sensed an explosive decompression and called on the intercom for us to immediately put on our oxygen masks.

We were still in formation. After all the hell broke loose, we settled down to survey the damage. It appeared that we were hit with a 20mm explosive shell just inches above Carter's head and right in Ed Haggerty's flight engineer's position. Ralph Weinberg was sprayed with shrapnel as was Royal Klaver. Joe Duemig informed us on the intercom that our right side blister had blown away, and Sgt. Hornyia was parachuting down. Royal Klaver radioed life guard submarines of our predicament, but Hornyia was never found.

We continued our flight to Luichow and landed there. About sunset, we were called for a meeting with an Associated Press news reporter named White. In retrospect, I think it was Teddy White, the China correspondent for *Time Magazine*. We were briefed not to mention our names because Tokyo Rose would pick it up and make an issue of it in her broadcasts. This did not concern us so we gave names anyway. The story was filed, and our names made all the newspapers the following day. My hometown newspaper--the *Delta Democrat Times*--in Greenville, Mississippi, carried the story.

We departed Luichow the next day. I remember seeing trains evacuating the area with hundreds, maybe thousands of Chinese aboard. The Japanese captured the base a few weeks later.

Ed "Shorty" Haggerty remembers some hairy moments on the mission: After leaving the target area, Mac and I had removed our helmets and were kind of leaning over to put them on the floor. Mac would have been leaning to his left and I to my right when the fighter hit us. He must have come in about one o'clock high because as we were leaning over, a shell came bursting into the cockpit right over Mac's head, hitting the armor plate between Mac and me. I believe if Mac hadn't been leaning over, he would not be with us today. As the shell hit the armor plate, portions of the shell started flying around. I think some parts hit the large rheostat for flying suits just to the right of my instrument panel. The shrapnel and parts of the rheostat all contributed to the cockpit damage and the injuries to Ralph and Fritz. After things calmed down somewhat, we began checking the systems. I found we couldn't change prop or turbo settings. With wounded on board and a sick airplane, it was decided to head for the nearest friendly base.

After getting Weinberg and Klaver to the hospital we worked on the plane and found that the wire bundle along the front space on the left side was damaged. We managed to run down and make temporary repairs. As for the blown blister, there were, of course, no spares in China, so we found a piece of metal and by removing some blister mounting screws, we secured the metal over the forward edge of the blister hole. We hoped the air stream passing over the deflection would cause a venturi action and relieve some of the air blast into the aircraft. Back in India, repairs were made, and the aircraft was ready for the next mission.

Just for information, my mother's name was Minnie and along with the monsoons we experienced in India, this is how our aircraft #6295 got its name, *Monsoon Minnie*.

Editor's Note: *Monsoon Minnie* had other adventures soon after this mission. One month later (11/17/44), with Bobby Shanks as pilot, *Monsoon Minnie* flew a mission to Bangkok from Chakulia. They were hit by fighter fire, setting #3 engine on fire, forcing an emergency landing at Chittagong. Stan Poplaski, tail gunner, was wounded--his third Purple Heart.

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