

Hurricane Hunters

I braced myself, waiting for huge vibrations and stared at the co-captains' computer. 103 miles away from the eyes, it read. It was my first flight into a hurricane as a meteorologist. I was thoroughly trained and knew almost everything you could know about hurricanes. The plane was currently 96 miles from great blasts of thunderstorms and whirling winds. Other meteorologists say that the storm can be so bad surrounding the eye, you can't even see the wings of the plane. The jolting turbulence became greater and I clenched my seat. My job was to record some of the tests taken, along with another scientist. I didn't need to do anything until we reached our destination, which was now 74 miles away.

I stared out the window into the spinning gray clouds and told myself it was for a good cause. Everyone on the East coast of the United States needed to know where this storm was heading. To my left was a box filled with weather sensing canisters which took our tests about the hurricane. The tests included wind speed, temperature, pressure, and humidity. They would help us identify the path of the hurricane. I heard a voice on my head phones and snapped out of my daze. It was the captain telling everyone to prepare for some extra turbulence; we were ten miles from the eye. I got out my notebook and a pencil, ready to record. As it grew darker and darker outside of the cabin, I could hear beeps from the computers and the captains talking.

There was a violent set of shaking and then the turbulence seemed to decrease dramatically and it was brighter outside. The sensors were being dropped from the plane already; I could see the bright yellow parachutes opening and floating, getting caught in the strong breezes. There were two quick beeps and data began flowing in. It was all organized, but I had to put it in graphs and tables when we returned to our lab. I started recording, a little messy from the bumps and jerks, but it was legible which was all that mattered now. The sensors were out of the plane, and were barely out of site. Ten minutes after the first canister was dropped, the data started to slow, and I finished up my duty of the recording. It was time to head through the vicious thunderstorms and land at Tampa International Airport.

I looked over my notes after the horrible turbulence had calmed, and realized how strong this hurricane was. It was rated a four out of five, with winds at 132.8 miles per hour. The humidity was 100%. My partner focused on the pressure and temperature tests. I caught a glance at the barometer which read 29 inches of mercury, and the temperature was about 60 degrees Fahrenheit. As we cruised in lighter wind speeds, I could see Florida, about twenty minutes until touchdown. Our difficult journey had come to an end.