

## VIENNA '44

By Emmett S. Goff, LTC USAFR (Ret), Former SSgt. Gunner, Corley's Crew, 484th Bomb Group, 825th Squadron . . . 1944



AN ME 109 BORES IN AT 3 O'CLOCK LOW FOR A HEAD-ON ATTACK, A FAVORITE TACTIC OF THE G.A.F. BECAUSE THE CLOSING TIME WAS EXTREMELY SHORT WHILE KEEPING OUT OF THE TOP TURRET RANGE OF THE B-24 LIBERATOR. DAVE HOYER PHOTO

They slept under the watchful eyes of sentries, making only occasional creaks as the wind snuggled around the ailerons and stabilizers and starlight glinted dimly on their wings. The sentries paced in front of them keeping company through the night until in a few hours, in the early dawn, they and others should come to life.

A half mile away in a farmhouse that had once been an Italian farmer's pride a soldier was finishing his coffee and cursing the war which kept him awake. Finishing his coffee he looked at his watch and reached for his jacket and flashlight. It was time to wake the flying crews, after which he could get some rest.

He buttoned his collar tightly and stepped out into the cold darkness. Crawling into his waiting jeep he cursed the coldness of Italian nights.

The noise of the jeep's brakes by the first tent woke the men as no bugle ever could and told them it was time to get up and that the mission was still on. Lights flickered on in the long rows of tents as men arose and pulled on warm clothes. It would be cold flying up there today, and wool socks and

shirts were things which helped.

Breakfast was hurried but quiet. Coffee and sandwiches were the fare. (These stories of American flyers eating well being so much nonsense. . .)

The fellows speculated as they ate on the mission they were about to fly. They figured from the bomb and gas load it would be a long one. Maybe Vienna. Or Budapest.

There was a faint hint of dawn in the east as the men crowded into the briefing shack. It'd be daylight by the time they were on their way and maybe dark again by the time they'd be back.

Like a school teacher, the officer mounted the platform and all voices hushed in anticipation as, pointer in hand he turned to the map and announced the mission. Today's attack would be on Vienna where they would hit marshalling yards and fresh shipments of supplies; oil, food, and ammunition. They should expect carburetor icing at 14,000 feet, partly cloudy weather on the way but clear over Austria.

Three hundred flak guns could be expected and fighters anytime after leaving Italy.

The men absorb the information intently, their eyes following the pointer over the map learning the route, distances, facts, figures, learning about emergency airfields and colors of the day.

On the wall hangs the portrait of a pretty girl, such as many dream of, love and cherish. Her soft warm eyes plead "please get there---and back!" The pointer has left the map now and the officer is answering questions. He's done his best to prepare the men, and secretly wishing he was young enough again to go himself.

It's beginning to get light outside as the men swarm out of the briefing and crowd into the waiting trucks, lined up ready to take them to their airplanes. Some joke. Some smoke. Some just sit and think, as the truck covers the half mile to the field. They talk about the card game last night, or the cook and the gunner who had a fight.

The sentries are gone, and the bombers are coming to life, with power generators burning and bomb bay lights on, and with crew chiefs making their last minute checks. Preparation gains momentum as the air crews start to arrive; the engineer, pilots, gunners, bombardier and navigator.

The engineer talks with the ground chief and learns about little things which may be wrong. He gives the airplane his own preflight check, item by item as his training has taught him.

The tail gunner crawls back to check his turret. If anything is wrong he'd better know it now. He charges his machine guns, checks his ammunition, tries his elevation and azimuth, and looks at the gun sights and oxygen supply.

It's light now and you gather outside and dress. You put on your electric suit and slippers, over which go heavier pants and jacket, and finally parachute, helmet, and boots. Time is growing short now and everyone hurries. The pilot's ready to start engines. It's time to climb aboard. Time to get to work. Time to get into the air, and on the way.

The engines cough to life, one by one till their roar deafens one's ears and shakes the ship. The crew chief hands the fire extinguisher to the gunner standing in the bomb-bay, looks him in the eye for a second, and is gone.

The engines are quieted finally and the pilot gets his signal to taxi. Slowly the man-made bird moves out of the revetment and bounces along the dirt road towards the runway where other bombers are lined up. Like cars at a traffic light, waiting their turn to take off.