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# *The Mission*

## *By Art Ouellette*



*Mike Rainey, Art Ouellette, and Rix De Lambert in front of our tent.*

### ***How the Pilot almost got nailed by his Own Propeller***

to the flight room for the morning's briefing. This was a time of trepidation for most of us as we awaited the impending announcements. The arrival of the briefing officer usually was cause for much stirring about as the crews openly wished for an easy mission, and secretly prayed for a milk run. After preliminary remarks the curtain was finally parted to display the target for today plotted out on the plastic coated king size map that covered the wall. We could all see that the target would be somewhere in Northern Italy. Unlike the moans that usually greeted the unveiling of a particularly tough target, this new destination

The guy with the flashlight wasn't too early that morning so that was an early indication that today's mission might not be a lengthy one. All of our crew were on call for that day's mission so there was stirring in the four corners of the tent. Although it was early January, the 4th in fact, I really didn't feel the outside cold as at this early hour our stove still had not run out of fuel. The zippers on most of the sleeping bags were slowly being pulled back by the early risers. A few of the six still lay still as they opted for a few spare moments of rest, but we all realized we must get up. There was no phone on the night stand available for a last minute call to the boss to advise him that we were taking one of our many available sick days. Getting out of flying a mission at this last hour would have been a betrayal to the rest of the guys. Men throughout our group were at this moment crawling out of their sacks. Bare feet hitting the freezing floors, were a constant reminder of the cold outside. A few Brrrrs were heard after the floor contact followed by some minor moans and groans as each of us tried to rub away the latest kink we had picked up during the night's sleep.

At this stage of our missions (4 more to go) all the small talk, verbal exchanges or serious disagreements had been placed on the back burner. Serious silence now dominated these early morning awakenings as the men slowly dressed. Breakfast was usually scrambled eggs, sausage, toast and coffee. The chow hounds still rushed to head up the line, and ate heartily for sustenance, others for the sake of maintaining stability in their stomachs opted for toast and coffee. After this early morning meal we would proceed

brought little reaction from the attending crews.

"Our target for today will be the marshaling yards at Trento, Italy". So spoke the briefing officer that morning. Today, if you were to check the 208 missions flown by the 484th Bomb Group you would find that Trento, Italy was hit only once by our group. Today, if you asked any of the survivors from that mission, I am sure they would all say once was enough.

This would be the 140th mission flown by the 484th. We were told that 28 B-24's would be used in this raid. Of that number only one was forced back to base by mechanical failure. That is a pretty good indicator that this target did not put much fear in the minds of the crews and they seemed anxious to chalk up this soft touch. We were then told that flak would be light as there were few guns in the area. They assured us there was little chance of being hit by enemy fighters and our return would be covered by friendly fighter escort. That was the kind of information one liked to hear and the confidence level was rising by the second. Sounded like this might be a milk run.

After that briefing I believe most of the crews that day believed we indeed were in for a much needed breather. We filed out of the flight room to the awaiting trucks for the bumpy 3 mile ride to the flight line supply room to draw our flying equipment. This would include heated suit, boots, oxygen mask, Mae West, parachute, 45 caliber pistol, an escape kit that contained \$48, a food ration, and maps, and the newly arrived flak jacket and helmet. These would be topped off with our new Alpaca flying suits. The outmoded sheepskin and leather suits had been replaced by