

the F-3 electric suits. They comprised of a light weight jacket, trousers, boots, and gloves all wired to be plugged together and worn under the outer flying suit. The old sheepskin boot was still being worn here. For gloves we started off with the thin silk glove that allows us gunners to work on our guns at high altitude without our skin sticking to the metal. These were then covered by the heated gloves. This whole get up had proved much more comfortable and allowed for greater ease of movement for crew members. All this gear was thrown into the large B-2 equipment bag, tossed onto the trucks for the trip to the hard stands and the awaiting planes that were being checked out by their respective crew chiefs. The truck pulled up near B-24 number 24, and our crew piled out. I hadn't even bothered to zip the equipment bag shut for the short ride and immediately started to dress. Some of the guys would dress aboard the ship others like myself preferred to dress right there on the hard stand. As I discarded my regular clothes they went into the B-2. I put it into the waist section of the plane through the open door of the back hatch, and hoisted myself aboard. The bag was stowed into any available corner that was out of the way, and I went about a visual check of my turret and oxygen equipment. I was as ready as I was going to be. The bulk of our missions had been flown aboard plane number 24 so the crew was pretty familiar with this plane and its crew chief, Sgt. Coleman. He was the tech sergeant who was assigned to mechanically care for this particular ship. Most of these engineers knew their business and their planes. They were even capable of pulling complete engine changes right there on the flight line. Number 24 was in its original aluminum state as they no longer painted the planes because it only added extra drag to the ship. The nose of this plane didn't sport any painting as nose art already was becoming a thing of the past. Just the large numerals 2 and 4 graced the metal skin of the front of the fuselage, and 14 small stenciled red bombs under the pilot's window indicating this aircraft had completed 14 missions. We always thought of number 24 as being ours but the twin tails bore the red bow tie design of the 484th so it had also been flown by other crews. Some of our crew had their A-2 Jackets painted with a bathing beauty riding on a bomb but that was our only personal touch.

Number 24 was ready to go and Sgt. Coleman gave our pilot Chief Don Zimmerman the thumbs up, and they started their pre flight check. I was in the waist section and never did learn a whole lot about engines. Usually riding back there with me were tail gunner Rix "Buck" De Lambert, Nose gunner "Big" Jim Carney, and Top Gunner Mike Rainey. Normal waist passengers, engineer Kahn and radio man Kinney were attending to business on the flight deck and would only return to their waist guns when the flight was under way when they would shift positions with Rainey and Carney who moved forward to their combat positions.

By now the pilots were revving the engines to see if they passed the test, and soon we would be ready to taxi to the runway. We were all plugged into the intercom as we listened to the exchanges going on between the flight leaders, the tower or our pilot as they made ready for take off. We prepared to leave the hard stand and assume our proper position in the take off line up. I listened to the purr of the warmed up engines as they prepped themselves for the lunge forward. Soon the commands came down and every ship in turn approached the take off point, pushed the throttles forward to unleash their full fury, released the brakes and the big birds slowly moved forward as they sought freedom from the ground. We were airborne and all aboard felt a relief as we

finally lifted from the metal matting. Now the long process of forming up the group began as we started to gain altitude in a series of large lazy circles. The crew would get to their normal positions during these maneuvers and ready themselves for battle.

Shaping a bomb group into a battle formation was a slow methodical process that required patience on every one's part but eventually the geometric designs of the individual Able, Baker, Charlie triangles would form into the group master plan for the raid. This particular day, by the time we had reached that point we were high over the Adriatic Sea as we headed north toward the target. All the gunners by now had taken their positions in their turrets awaiting the pilots command to test their guns. This soon was heard and I let fly a few short bursts away from the close formation. I followed the tracers in flight, there were no malfunctions, my guns were ready if the need arose. I then started an occasional panning of the air space beneath me. Right and left, and then slow 360's. We were on our way. Up to this point things were pretty much like most of our other missions.

We kept climbing slowly getting to the altitude they wanted to attain. They reached that elevation, and then cruised north over water up the Adriatic Sea. When we reached a turning point just about between Venice and Trieste the formation banked left toward Trento. We were now flying overland and not too far left of the Ossoppo airstrip near Udine. This at one time was a base for German and Facisti ME 109 fighters who enjoyed hitting stragglers from here.

There was a report that a twin engine jet scout-bomber had also flown out of here for awhile. Trento lies near the foot of the Dolomite Alps in Northern Italy. The elevation of these mountains runs from 5000 to 12000 feet at their highest point at Marmolata. Any train to Austria had to follow the Dolomites north to the Brenner Pass. Recon reports to mission planners at 49th Wing command had the double tracks at the Trento marshaling yards clogged with rolling stock.

The pickings would be good for the 15th Air Force that day. We reached another turning point and headed for our IP. From that point it was a straight arrow course directly to the target. The formation ahead of us were now on their bomb run and had a successful drop without getting any flak. At that moment all hell broke loose in our formation, the 824th and the 825th squadrons. Before we hit the IP to start our bomb run heavy and intense flak started to explode into, above and below, the planes in our V formations.

I can only tell you of what I saw and felt that day. If there were no fighters reported in the target area it was the practice of the ball gunners to bring their turrets to a stop and open the turret door during the bomb run. This at least allowed for some possibility of escape in case of a direct hit.

I was standing on the seat of my turret as our ship was being rocked by the Flak, and the black puffs seemed to be everywhere one looked. It sounded as if someone was beating on the sides of our ship with a baseball bat. I picked this up even though my ears were covered by the ear phones of my flight helmet. I could also see black puffs through the waist windows, as I looked right and left.

The plane was swaying as I held on to the post that supported the ball turret. The three of us in the waist as well as the tail gunner, who had opened up his turret were looking about for damage as the plane continued its run on the target.