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 hushed 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.