

and caught on fire. They saw Pantanella AAF below them so they decided to try an emergency landing. They were unable to get down fast enough to make a single straight-in approach and they overshot the runway, firing flares as they came in. They found that they did not have enough power to climb out so they pulled up the gear and belly-landed in a wheat field off the end of the runway.

Shortly after the 4-man crew climbed out, the plane was totally engulfed in flames but no one was injured. Sheetz said, "One of the crash investigators told me that he thought he could have landed the plane but he added that he might have gotten everyone killed, too." Because of the crash landing, Sheetz did not fly the June 13th mission to Innsbruck. Neither did David Brown, the original engineer on the crew, who was sick with the flu that day. Replacing them that day was Lt. Robert Remington, pilot, and Sgt. Frederick Howland, engineer. The other crewmen are the same ones that had been together all through training: Richard Olson (co-pilot), Walter Chapman (bombardier), John Hassan (navigator), Bill Snyder (radio operator), Irwin Hansen (nose turret), Edwin Rogers (ball turret), Ralph Stokes (tail turret), and Alvin Houpt (top turret).

On June 13th, the 484th Bomb Group sent 37 B-24s to bomb German fighter production facilities at Munich. The group lost 4 planes to fighters on their bomb run although they were unable to bomb the target because of smoke screens that obscured it. They had to turn to their alternate target, the marshalling yards at Innsbruck.

On the way to Munich, my father's plane, "Vivacious Lady," lost its number one engine to mechanical problems and had to leave the formation, being unable to keep up with the group, which was still climbing. They made their turn to head back to base not long after clearing the Adriatic coast on the way north. Walt Chapman said that before they even finished their turn out of the formation they were attacked by German Me-109s.

The enemy fighters had apparently been following the group but were unwilling to face the concentrated firepower of the 4 squadrons. John Hassan said he saw at least 8 Me-109s attack his plane. Walt Chapman told me he was in the nose, calling out fighters as they came in from different directions. "I called the first one out at 6 o'clock and I remember Houpt in the top turret yelling at Stokes to open up. Stokes waited until the fighter was within about 300 yards before he fired and the fighter just exploded in mid-air. As I recall, Houpt got one, and someone in the waist or ball turret got one, too. There may have been one other one that our nose gunner shot down."

"Snyder was a hell of a shot with a machine gun and he should be given credit for 5 planes while flying on our crew" John Hassan said. When I asked Bill Snyder about it he said, "I don't think I got five but I got a couple." The records of the 484th Bomb Group give official credit for one Me-109 to Houpt, Stokes, Rogers, and Hansen on the June 13th mission.

Bill Snyder was given credit for one 2 days earlier on a mission to Giurgiu, Rumania. Walt Chapman headed for the flight deck to get his Mae West and parachute at about the time the bomb bay burst into flames. "No one told me to leave the nose but I knew we were gone" he said. "We were in a running fight that lasted about ten minutes and the fighters shot out two more engines and started a fire in the bomb bay. Let me tell you, nothing will get you moving like fire. I opened the bomb bay doors and put on my chute. I did not have time to get my Mae West on

and we were over water when I bailed out, When I left the nose to go get my parachute, I'm sure Hansen was still firing his guns.

"Maybe if I had stayed there, I would have been killed, too. I sat down on the catwalk in the bomb bay and I could barely pull myself out of the plane. Others on the flight deck were coming down right behind me and between the kicking and yelling, they persuaded me to get out."

"The plane was in a steep descent and I could not pull myself out either," John Hassan told me. "I'm sure your dad pushed me out. That just shows you what happens when the chips are down. You get a big hand in the back and a shove from a guy named Olson. We still had our bombs on board and we were lucky they were 500 lb. demolition bombs. If they had been incendiaries, I don't think we would have survived the fire. Alvin Houpt, in the top turret, had been hit in the legs and was unconscious.

"Lt. Olson pulled the release on my seat and dropped me down onto the flight deck. That brought me around a little and I remember him telling me 'Al, we've got to get out of here.'

"He got me down to the bomb bay and he jumped from the plane with me in his arms. He pulled my ripcord for me, too." Al sent me a nice letter after I first contacted him that said he always wondered what had happened to his crew and to the man who saved his life. In the waist, Bill Snyder was trying to help Edwin Rogers, the ball turret gunner, who had apparently also been hit. "I heard him say, 'I've had it,' Bill told me." I never heard him say anything else after that."

"The German fighters must have come up underneath us and hit him and Hansen too. I grabbed a handful of spent 50 cal. shells from the floor of the plane and threw them at the tail turret. Stokes turned around and looked at me, and I pointed to the open hatch in the floor and jumped. Stokes told me later that he knew what I meant and that he came out right after me."

Ralph Stokes reported in a later de-briefing that the bomb bay was "like a blast furnace." He also reported that my father said he saw 20 mm cannon fire bursting near the nose and that he thought some of the shells had hit the nose. The crew chief, Frederick Howland, must have jumped at about the same time as Stokes and Snyder. Irwin Hansen and Edwin Rogers never got out and fell with the plane.

Hugh Sheetz told me that he saw my father after the war and that dad told him that he did not pull his chute until he could see people walking around on the ground. He landed within a few hundred yards of some type of German garrison and was captured right away. He suffered shell fragment wounds to the leg and sustained a back injury that would not allow him to stand for several days. He said that Remington actually came down in the Adriatic Sea and had to float for 5 hours until an Italian fishing boat rescued him. He was turned over to the Germans and ended up in Stalag III along with Stokes, Snyder, and Olson.

Bill Snyder said that he landed in a freshly plowed field and before he knew it, a German soldier had a gun in his back. "I had taken off my heavy electric boots and it was hurting my bare feet as we walked across the field to a road. A young Italian girl was riding her bike on the road and she asked the soldier if she could give me her wooden sandals. I wore those sandals right up to the time I got to POW camp. I remember that Stokes was with me when they took our ID pictures. We sat together when they took our photograph and then they cut the picture in two. That way they only had to take one picture for the 2 ID cards.

"I saw your father in POW camp just about every day and we