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 to-
tally 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 (navi-
gator), Bill Snyder (radio operator), Irwin Hansen (nose turret),
Edwin Rogers (ball turret), Ralph Stokes (tail turret), and Alvin
Houpit (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 Inns-
bruck.

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 Chap-
man said that before they even finished their turn out of the for-
mation 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 Houpit in the top turret yell-
ing at Stokes to open up. Stokes waited until the fighter was
within about 300 yards before he fired and the fighter just expl-
oded in mid-air. As I recall, Houpit 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 3 planes while flying on our crew” John Has-
san 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 Houpit, Stokes, Rog-
ers, and Hansen on the June 13th mission.

Bill Snyder was given credit for one 2 days earlier on a mis-
sion 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, noth-
ing 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
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 Houpit, 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 remem-
ber 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, Fred-
rick 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 sus-
tained 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 res-
cued 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 hurtling 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