

**Shot Down: The True Story of Pilot Howard Snyder and the Crew of the B-17 Susan Ruth.**  
By Steve Snyder. Seal Beach CA: Sea Breeze Publishing, 2015. Photographs. Maps. Pp. 360.  
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After a 40-year professional career, Steve Snyder chose to chronicle his father's World War II experiences as a retirement project. He had accompanied his parents to reunions on both sides of the Atlantic and got hooked! Reading his parents' letters, attending their reunions, and corresponding with his father's crew convinced him that he should write this book.

Howard Snyder, Jr. was born in 1915 in Norfolk NE. He moved to Glendale CA when 13 because of his father's poor health. While attending a church summer camp a decade later, he would meet Ruth Hempel. They married in July 1941—about the same time the Army drafted him. With a baby on the way and realizing an enlisted man does not make much, he volunteered for the Army Air Corps and was commissioned in April 1943. He learned to fly a B-17 and was assigned to the Eighth Air Force. Snyder named his B-17 *Susan Ruth* after his first born.

The crew of *Susan Ruth* was assigned to the 306BG located in Thurleigh, England, in October 1943. The following month, their first combat mission was bombing Wilhelmshaven's naval base. On February 9, 1944, returning home on its fourth mission (Frankfurt), *Susan Ruth* was attacked by two Fw 190s. Two crewmembers were killed, and Snyder ordered everyone to bail out. Upon landing, the survivors were picked up, separated, and hidden by the Belgium resistance in local villages along with other American airman. Almost three months later, the Gestapo surrounded one of the huts; and they were arrested—just prior to beginning their escape to the Pyrenees. Others were more fortunate and escaped only to be captured later and interned for the remainder of the war.

But not Howard Snyder. Crossing into France and aborting several attempts to proceed south, he joined the French Maquis, a group of French guerilla fighters. In early September 1944, near Trelon, France, he made contact with Patton's Third Army and was sent to England to rejoin the 306th. Seven months after leaving English soil, he had returned. His crewmates soon followed after the Allies liberated POW camps throughout Germany.

A concluding chapter chronicles the Snyder family returning to Belgium in the 1980s to attend several reunions and remembrances ceremonies.

Steve Snyder has written a terrific book, expertly weaving background material with the experiences of his father, told via the letters sent home to his wife. He covers aircrew life, training in the US and UK, and experiences while deployed. He also describes Eighth Air Force tactics and the B-17 itself. During his research, he even found the Luftwaffe pilot who shot his father's plane down!

A reader knowledgeable about the European Theatre will not learn much from the first half of the book. But from the attack of the Fw 190s through the liberation in France, the book reads like a World War II action thriller. I wish Snyder had included more of his father's experiences evading capture. Unfortunately, a reader must endure over half of the book before the "Shot Down" is covered.

The book is lavishly illustrated throughout with photos, drawings, Howard's handwritten diary entries, and maps. These add greatly to the accompanying text. However, some of these illustrations are of such low resolution, that they are virtually useless.

If interested in learning about one Eighth AF pilot's unique experiences, this work will do nicely. In the preface, Snyder wrote that "truth is stranger than fiction. You can't make this stuff up." For Howard Snyder, truer words have never been spoken.

*Scott Marquiss, docent, National Air and Space Museum's Mall and Udvar-Hazy facilities*