

Incredible story of war hero

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It's a tale often told. The wartime bomber shot down, the crew bail out, but what happens next to B-17 pilot Howard Snyder is an incredible story of bravery and survival.

In his book, *Shot Down*, author and the pilot's son, Steve Snyder describes his father's wartime experiences, based at Thurleigh, with the US Airforce.

Wearing a jacket which bears his father's name tag and uniform badges from 70 years ago, Steve said his book was inspired by the letters his father wrote from Bedfordshire, which contain 'a wealth of information' about life during the Second World War.

He said: "My father was with the 306 Bomb Group, a division of the 8th Airforce. He and his crew were based at Thurleigh from October, 1943.

"They had flown seven missions prior to being shot down over German-occupied

Belgium on February 8, 1944."

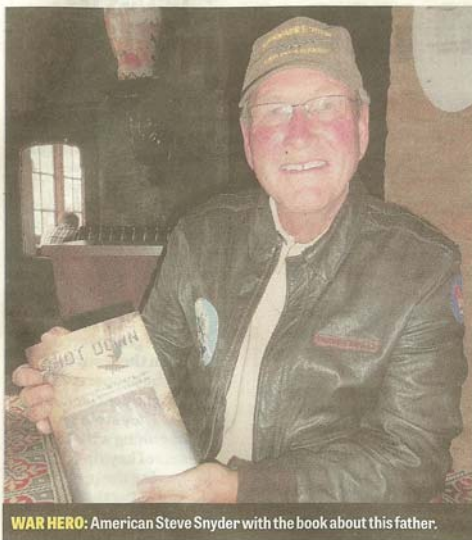
He added: "The night before, he was getting drunk in The Falcon, in Bletsoe. But I'm sure that was not the first time!"

The book describes in detail the moment Howard's Flying Fortress, named Susan Ruth after his baby daughter, was hit by German fire.

Two crew members were killed with two others seriously injured. With the plane on fire and losing altitude, the men bailed out, and, remarkably, Howard Snyder survived the parachute jump and went into hiding.

He was Missing In Action for seven months, during which time he joined the Maquis, an arm of the French Resistance, carrying out acts of sabotage. He made it home after the Belgian Liberation when he was able to rejoin American troops.

Steve's detailed research give the reader a remarkable insight into the lives of the airmen and life in wartime Bedfordshire. It also describes the bravery of the Belgian people who risked their lives to help the airmen.



WAR HERO: American Steve Snyder with the book about his father.

Steve said: "Dad kept a diary after being shot down, which he left behind in Belgium with a couple who were hiding him. They passed it to a US army man who sent it back

to my parents with a return address. He was then able to keep in contact with the people who helped him."

The book also contains more than 200 pictures col-

'Shot Down is a tribute to his father's bravery and all who helped him'

lected from Howard's friends, Belgian historians and from the US Airforce archives.

Steve even contacted the German pilot who shot the Susan Ruth out of the sky, who is now in his 90s. He said: "My father would have thought it was impossible to find him but he is still alive.

"My youngest son is going to visit him and hand him a copy of the book."

Over the years, Steve visited Belgium with his father. He said: "Some of the houses he hid in are still there.

"He was able to point out a window he jumped from one time.

"During a visit in 1994, for the 50th anniversary of the Liberation of Belgium, he was

treated like a king.

"It's amazing how the people honour and remember the troops."

Next week, Steve and his wife, Glenda, are returning to Belgium with their three sons, and the relatives of the other crew members, to mark the 70th anniversary of the liberation, and visit the memorial to the Susan Ruth, in Macquenoise, which features the plane's broken propeller.

Steve says *Shot Down* is a tribute, not only to his father's bravery but to all the Belgian people who risked their lives to help him.

He added: "It is one example of the millions of extraordinary stories which tell what the Greatest Generation went through.

"The whole purpose is to remember all of them. It's our duty to remember what they went through to preserve our freedom."

Shot Down is available from www.amazon.com.

The airfield at Thurleigh now houses the 306 Bombardment Group Museum.

For more details go to www.306bg.co.uk