

Crash of the A 20 K of pilot Charles D. Renfrow
near Otzenhausen on 13th March 1945

Statement by Captain William C. Kahle
119th Infantry Regiment, 30th Infantry Division
22 March 1945

“At 1707, 13 March 1945, in the target area our aircraft was hit by flak burst and immediately began to lose altitude. The pilot took a heading away from the target area. Flak persisted for several minutes while Capt. Renfrow was taking evasive action. I heard Capt Renfrow calling back for a fix. I was not aware of the particular difficulty in which he found himself because he kept reassuring me that we would make it. At approximately 1725 Captain Renfrow ordered the crew to bail out. A minute or two later when I was about to drop from the aircraft I noticed the right engine had stopped. I reached the ground at approximately 1730.

I was taken prisoner within three or four minutes of the time I landed and I was marched to the orderly room of a Field-Gendarmerie C. P. situated at Otzenhausen, Germany. There, while I was being interrogated, I learned that the aircraft crashed approximately 2 kilometers away (I saw the smoke while I was being marched down the road). During the course of the interrogation a soldier entered the room bearing Captain Renfrow's parachute and his personal effects. I was told that Captain Renfrow was dead: 'Every bone in his body is broken' The body was found about 150 feet from the plane. When the interrogation was completed my personal effects were wrapped in a handkerchief and the same was done with those of Capt Renfrow. While I was in the room I overheard a telephone conversation. My captors were making arrangements for burying Capt. Renfrow and for the removal of the crashed aircraft. At approximately 2130 I was taken to Hermeskeil under guard. The guard carried the report of the interrogation and our personal effects.

At Hermeskeil I met Sgt. Holmquist. We were turned over to a prisoner collecting group and remained there 2 days. Then we were evacuated to Börfink, remained there one day and were marched to Oberbrombach where we were turned over to a Veterinary outfit. At this point Capt Renfrow's personal effects were turned over to me. I kept his Identification tags and his money and threw the rest away (glasses case and pocket comb). We were then moved to a point approximately two miles southeast of Baumholder. In that area we managed to escape and reported to the S-2 of the 302 Regiment, 94th Division which had entered Baumholder a day after my arrival in the vicinity.”

Statement by Staff Sergeant Donald F. Holmquist
644 BS, 22 March 1945

“On 13 March 1945, at approximately 1707 while my aircraft was in the target area we encountered ground fire. The aircraft was hit by a burst of flak. Capt Renfrow called me and asked about battle damage. I reported there was an oil leak in the left engine and an apparent gas leak in the right engine. After this hit the plane began to lose altitude. I heard Capt Renfrow call the box leader and tell him we were leaving the formation due to a gas and oil leak. We went back through the flak area on both engines. Immediately after leaving the flak area we went on single engine (right). Then we started to lose altitude a bit more rapidly. The pilot called for location of the nearest airfield. He was told it was 90 miles away. He asked how far he was from our lines. The report was 55 miles. After the last report the pilot kept in almost continual contact with the ground station but I could hear what I believed was another plane in trouble asking for his position. Apparently the pilot did not hear this other plane as he also asked the

ground station about this time where we were. The report came in "2 miles west of Bastogne". The pilot then gave orders to bail out and notified the ground station to that effect.

I was second to bail out and landed about three blocks outside the village of Schwarzenbach. There I was taken prisoner by a mixed group of civilians and Wehrmacht (I did not see the aircraft after I jumped). From Schwarzenbach I was taken to a prisoner collection station at Hermeskeil where I met Capt. Kahle. We stayed two nights and two days. Artillery started shelling this town Thursday night so we were sent back. We went to Bõrfink, stayed there one day and were marched to Oberbrombach where we were taken into custody by a Veterinary outfit. From Oberbrombach we were sent two miles south east of Baumholder. In that area we managed to escape and reported to the S-2 of 302 Regiment, 94th Division which had entered Baumholder a day after our arrival in the vicinity."

Oberbrombach - Geschichte der Ortschaft
by Dr. Freimut Heiderich
translation of page 407

In the basement of our house two pilots who had bailed out with their chutes were kept and in the same basement some German soldiers took cover against the attacking US fighter planes. What an experience for the pilots who experienced the receiving side of the matter. When the fighters turned away and "peace" returned, tension calmed down between the rest of the potatoes. One of the Americans spoke German without any slang [Kahle]. He was talking to the German soldiers about his flying and the ten-year-old son of the Heiderichs listened fascinated. Americans and Germans talked like old friends sitting in a pub. No idea of enemies or capture. The second American [Holmquist] seemed to be afraid of the things to come. Sometimes he got a translation of what they were talking about. He had lost the heel of one of his boots during bail out and now he got a subsidiary made of wood so he could walk. Soon after when night broke the German troops left the village toward Idar-Oberstein and the Rhine River far in the east. And the Americans had to accompany them.