

HOMELAND STORIES MINUTES



The Messerschmitt Bf 109E-4 of Oblt Franz von Werra shot down on the 5 September 1940, pictured at Winchet Hill, Love's Farm, Marsden, Kent Fallen Might, June 1983 issue of *Aeroplane Monthly* www.aeroplanemonthly.com

The One That Got Away

Oberleutnant Franz von Werra, a pilot shot down during the Battle of Britain was in transit to a remote PoW camp on the north shore of Lake Superior in January 1941, when he decided to jump off the moving train while still within reach of then neutral U.S.A. Assisted by fellow PoWs, who included Walter Manhard, he managed to thaw the window out of which he would dive head first.

Von Werra jumped successfully while the train was in the area of Smith Falls; he was only 30 miles from the St. Lawrence River. From a map he obtained at a local garage, he noted that the nearest point to cross the river was Prescott. The river was frozen and in the darkness he saw the lights of Ogdensburg on the US side.

Unfortunately once he'd made it to the middle of the river he found an unfrozen gap too wide to bridge. In a deserted holiday camp back on the Canadian side he found a row boat which he succeeded in pushing to the river with a great deal of effort. This time he made it across.

As soon as he could von Werra handed himself into the police who handed him over to US Immigration Authorities. He also contacted the German Consul in New York. While British and Canadian authorities

negotiated for his return, von Werra secretly stayed at the German Vice-Consul's home and then using a chain of German sympathizers made his way to the Mexican border, through South America to Rio de Janeiro, then via Barcelona to Rome and Germany.

Von Werra, a hero to the German nation for his daring escape, went back into active service. On October, 25, 1941, flying from a base in Holland his engine failed over the sea. No traces were ever found. *Oberleutnant* von Werra never did earn the Iron Cross that Hitler had bestowed upon him in anticipation of his future flying achievements.