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Murder of a prisoner of war

**Matthew Smith of Chicago investigates the background
of the death of his Uncle Sheppard Kerman**

By Karl-Ernst Hueske

Wolfenbüttel - On Thursday afternoon Matthew Smith took a small plastic bag with earth from the grave of his Uncle Sheppard Kerman from a Jewish cemetery in the town of Norrich (Norridge) near Chicago and scattered the contents onto the site in Wolfenbüttel's main graveyard where his uncle was initially buried 63 years ago.



Smith is presently visiting Wolfenbüttel to learn the background of an unusual war crime that happened in September 1944. He was assisted with his information gathering by Wilfried Knauer, a historian based in Wolfenbüttel's prison system who is also Director of the memorial to those killed during the war in Wolfenbüttel.

Knauer noted that at the time of the killing 23-year old Sheppard Kerman was crewman aboard a bomber that was on a mission from a base in Molesworth, England to Magdeburg, to bomb the Krupp Factory. During the mission the American bomber-squadron was attacked by German fighter planes. The plane of Pilot Victor Howard and Co-Pilot Jack L. Timmins, in which Kerman was a crewman, was struck repeatedly by 20-millimeter-shells. Parts of the plane fell from the sky and the bomber crashed in a field between Halchter and Ohrum, but not before the crew members had escaped by parachute. Sheppard Kerman also parachuted from the plane but came up short when his parachute got caught on the roof of an apartment building on Krumme Street in Wolfenbüttel.

What then happened was recalled by Markus Gröchtemeier, the archivist of Wolfenbüttel in his book which chronicles the period of the national-socialism in the rural district. Kerman was arrested by Captain Wilhelm Kamschack and pulled into a window behind the Crown Prince hotel.



Though Kerman was a Prisoner of War, his rights under the Geneva Convention were violated by Nazi Political Officer Otto Weinreich and Captain Kamschack who allegedly gave Gerd Beck the order to kill Kerman.

All three men were arrested and put on trial in front of War Crimes Tribunals in Dachau and Ludwigsburg. Beck was sentenced to the death at first, but one day before the execution a journalist from Associated Press named Dees intervened and Beck was resented to 20 years in prison and eventually pardoned according to records that Smith brought with him. Long sentences were also given to Weinreich and Kamschack.

Kerman was initially buried in Wolfenbüttel's main-graveyard near the site that is presently a memorial to the American, Russian, French and English victims. In June 1945, his body was transferred from Belgium (writer's error: It was Holland) to Chicago.

His nephew Matthew Smith became aware of many details about Wolfenbüttel over the investigations of the daughter of the Co-Pilot. Even today Smith finds it incomprehensible why his Uncle, who had formal Prisoner of War status, was murdered.

All of the other occupants of the downed bomber survived and made it through the Second World War in captivity.

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