

**Crash of American Thunderbolt pilot
Richard J. Armstrong
19th November 1944, Wellingen/Weiler**

**Combat report
by 2nd Lt. Francis E. Lewis jr.**

“I was flying Fairdawn Red Four on Ground Support on the afternoon of 19 November 1944. Lt. Armstrong was flying Red Two on Captain Doyle's wing. We had been in target area for approximately 20 minutes, dropped our bombs and were pulling up from a strafing run when Red Two (Lt. Armstrong) was hit by flak. I didn't observe the hits, since I was still completing my pass at the time. As I pulled up, I saw a ship about 1,000' above me and to my right, with a flaming cockpit. One wheel started down, and the canopy flew off, followed by the pilot. His chute popped out and looked alright, though it still hadn't started to fill. I was very close to the chute and pilot by then, so decided to follow him down to observe whatever I could about his landing. I expected to see the canopy billow out fully at any moment; however, this never happened. As I spiraled down after Lt. Armstrong I could see that he was suspended normally from the harness and was kicking and twisting his body about. The canopy was partly billowed out, but seemed to be constricted at the bottom of the canopy. The cloth fluttered and flapped as though all the air was being spilled. Other members of the flight agree that he had about 2000 feet when he left the ship – plenty of time for the chute to open. He hit in a ploughed field in a small ravine; the plane crashed and exploded in the same ravine about 500 feet away. He did not move after hitting the ground; the canopy collapsed over his body covering his legs and half his back. He must have hit very hard for dirt or mud kicked up at the impact. I buzzed him once and could see no movement. I saw no signs of troops in the immediate vicinity. The ground controller assured us he would send a patrol out for the body. This action took place shortly after 1400 hours. I had lost my flight, so came home with another.”