

Boatright Interview 7/23/04

Willis Boatright
(318) 343-1844

Guards:

Mostly treated as they were supposed to be treated. Most were not mean or abusive. Boatright said, "I was well pleased with my treatment considering we were at their mercy at all times." Most guards were very humane.

On the march. Some very mean guards. S.S. and Gestapo were known for being mean. They did not have much to do with the camp.

One guard at Luft IV was de-ranged and shot a prisoner. He was immediately relieved of his duties. We never saw him again.

Most guards were friendly enough. Sometimes, for instance, when we had a sing-along the guards would join in.

Germans got their share of the Red Cross parcels intended for the POW's. Guards often seen in American clothing and smoking American cigarettes.

Friendships:

When in Lager A, Boatright was with his surviving crewmates-Witt and Maisak were in the same room. Stoller was down the hall.

Then, Boatright got sick and was admitted to the infirmary. He was being treated for an infection and his bowels were completely clogged up. He was not getting better. Finally, he asked one of the German guards to get Epsom Salts and he brought them in to the infirmary the very next day. They worked and Boatright recovered.

While he was in the infirmary, all his crewmates were moved to another part of the camp (Lager B). When Boatright returned to his room he was no longer with his crew. Although they could not get together again they regularly met at the fence separating the two Lagers and could talk. It was important for them to stay in touch.

One day, Jim Davis came into the camp. Now five of the non-commissioned officers from the plane were together. Jim was assigned to Lager A and was able to room with Boatright. It was a happy day when Boatright shouted over the fence to the others that Davis was there. They now knew another had survived.

Main topics of conversations among the men: Always thinking about and talking about what they would do when they got home.

If anyone was sick or having any kind of problem the other POW's tried to help. They stuck together. The feeling was "We are all in this together – all in the same boat."

Boatright's Capture:

As Boatright parachuted to the ground he saw two men. They had a wagon being pulled by two horses. The men were out in the forest gathering firewood. Boatright landed nearby in a tree and was suspended there, his feet dangling just a few feet from the ground. One of the men came and helped Boatright out of his harness and to the ground. He was a former soldier, having fought in World War I and could speak limited English. He explained that he spent 15mos. in England as a POW of the British. The other fellow with him was older. Witt was picked up by these same men as they landed near each other. This German veteran understood somewhat what Witt and Boatright were going through. They conversed with them. The woodsmen were interested in war news and asked the airmen "When is the invasion."

There were mean people in the woods. They came with their guns with intention of harming them.

The two men began to walk Witt and Boatright to the village. An S.S. Trooper came by. He had his pistol drawn. Two young men with the home guard were with him. They had rifles. At first the SS Officer began to rant and rave in German. After a few minutes he switched to English and even began to get a little friendlier. He asked for cigarettes. Boatright didn't have any as he didn't smoke but Witt pulled out his cigarettes. He gave the Officer and the two younger men with him each three cigarettes.

Taken to a little village. Paraded in the streets. A number of people came out to witness this. Witt had a small New Testament in his pocket. The SS Officer took it out and showed it to the villagers. He called it a "Bee-Ble". The villagers gathered around to look at it but they didn't say anything. The officer gave the Bible back to Witt. Locked up in a building. After a while an official came to pick them up.

Witt and Boatright were both put into the same side-car and driven to an airbase.

Saw Maisak and Stoller the same day they were shot down. Knew they had survived.

Faith in God:

Even before being shot down he was well aware of the danger. He decided it was all up to God and he turned it over to Him. His faith sustained him and he was more peaceful as a result.

Church services. Had church the very first Sunday they were in camp. First of all one of the POW's lead the worship as they did not have any chaplains. (Note: Stoller told me his Bible was used for these first services.) The POW leading the services was from Ohio. They always managed to have some kind of religious service when Sunday came.

When the British came to the camp they had Padre Jackson. Well respected, forceful, knowledgeable, everyone liked him. After some time he was replaced – just seemed to disappear.

After a while had several different chaplains.

Boatright read his Bible frequently. On the bunk next to his was a Catholic man of Polish descent. They became good friends and had lively discussion about religion.

“Belief in God gives you something to stand on to help you get through the day.”

Boatright always thought he would make it through. Never thought he wouldn't make it. Took everything day by day.

Luft IV-Conditions:

Luft IV was a new camp.

Only water came from a well with a pump handle. No water in building.

Food: A lot of dehydrated cabbage.

Never full. Red Cross sent clothing and food parcels. Boatright never remembers having a full Red Cross Parcel. Often had to divide each small item in four different ways.

Usually two people had to share them.

D-bars (Chocolate bars) were a favorite in the Red cross parcel. Occasionally Boatright would make himself a treat of hot chocolate using pieces of the D-bar, powdered milk, and hot water.

Canned Salmon was often in the Red Cross parcels and Boatright developed a liking to that . He would trade cigarettes for Salmon. It must have helped keep him healthy as he regained his strength.

Hunger was the worst part of the whole experience. Boatright weighed 160 plus when captured. When weighed after liberation he weighted 108.

The German bread they were given to eat was a week old and stale. It was hard as a rock. You could tell a portion of it was sawdust as you could see the sawdust sprinkled on top.

Boredom a great problem: Confined day after day. Reading was the one thing done on a regular basis. For exercise POW's would walk around the compound.

Salvation Army brought in some sports equipment.

When the British came in after vacating the camp in Poland (Luft VI), they smuggled in a radio. Many prisoners carried a little piece of the radio and after they were settled in Luft IV they put the radio together again. They were able to get the news from the BBC. Then a courier would travel from barrack to barrack letting all the prisoners know about the war news. It was a real morale booster to know what was going on. Of course news about the Battle of the Bulge had the opposite effect.

Other Comments:

After evacuation of Luft IV, Boatright went to Nuremburg and Stalag VIIA at Moosburg. He left Luft IV by train. Eight days and nights on the train to Nuremburg. 50 men to a car. Only given water once every other day. No facilities. One man passed away on the trip, while locked in the car. He was from Brooklyn and was 36 years old. When he was in Luft IV his nephew arrived. They were re-united at the POW camp. Boatright marched later. Crossed the Danube. He was liberated on April 29, 1945 by Patton's Third Army. When they were first liberated they were told to remain in the camp. Davis didn't. He joined Patton's army and fought.

Maisak was evacuated by train to Luft III
Boatright and Davis on train to Nuremburg. Then marched together to Moosburg where they were liberated.
Witt and Stoller were marched out.

Comment about Davis: Prison life got to him. Always nervous. Boatright said it tried to take it all in stride – one day at a time!

Interview with Lloyd Stoller 6/16/04

Pedals of Fire Historical Fiction about WW II recommended by Stoller

Memories from Training

Delhart Texas-there was sand everywhere.

Boatright stayed on the base. He was always writing letters. Cleaned his clothes.

One incident when the guys went to a bar in New Mexico. It was about 50 miles from the base. The four of them (Stoller, Witt, Davis, and ?) were sitting in a booth. A mess hall sergeant from the base came in and hit Davis in the face. He hit him so hard that his head hit the back of the booth. Stoller explains that there was a gal on the table dancing and someone got fresh with her.

Stoller remembers when they were assigned a crew at Salt Lake City. He explains, when you are assigned a crew they give you a number and then you find other people with the same number. He still remembers they were crew 2110.

The Battle – Being Shot Down

According to records the fighters took three passes through the formation; 12:10, 12:20, and 12:30. Stoller noticed the cockpit clock reading 12:30 just as he began crawling toward the radio room. So, he believes that they were shot down on the third pass. He saw Tucker (the pilot) reaching beside his seat to get his chute.

Dad also saw Tucker crawling back from the cockpit area. Did Tucker bail out? No one knows. Note: It is known he was killed and was buried in Usingen, Germany.

As Stoller was bailing out he did not have his parachute hooked correctly. As the parachute deployed he felt a great amount of pain in his leg. He thought he was wounded. While he was falling he kept putting his hand to his leg and up to his face to see if he was bleeding. Sixty years later he still experiences pain in this leg.

Boatright saw the others bailing out. He raised his guns all the way up and bailed out the ball turret.

Maisak joined the crew later. He was a very quiet man. The others did not know him very well. He was Mormon from Utah. He was helping Stoller in trying to get the waist door open. He got stuck in the door. When he broke free his chute got a hole in it. He went down fast, passing everyone else by!

Greuter's wife visited Stoller after the war and wanted to know what happened to her husband. She wanted to know if he had died before the plane went down. She became very angry when Stoller told her he could not tell her exactly what happened. She could not be made to understand the inability to see each other in the plane and the ensuing chaos. It was not possible to know what happened to everyone else.

Things dad and Stoller did remember a few things about Greuter: He slept with his feet outside the covers. He didn't go on any drinking escapades with the rest of the crew. Dad remembers one time after returning from a mission Greuter's guns went off hit the Nissen huts.

Capture

When first landing Stoller ran from his parachute. The heated boots he was wearing fell off as he was parachuting to the ground. He had on a gold sweatshirt and he took it off and ripped it in two pieces. He wrapped the pieces around each foot so he could walk. *(Dad shared that he always strapped a pair of dress shoes to his harness so he would have shoes to wear if shot down.)*

While confined at Dulag Luft Stoller remembers seeing shoes sitting outside each room. He felt the guards must have taken everyone's shoes from the prisoners. After parachuting from the plane Stoller met up with two others. At first he thought they were Germans but on closer inspection he realized they were also American victims of the battle. One of the men was Jewish and extremely scared. He was visibly shaking. He was well aware of the German attitude toward Jews. He was worried about how he would be treated. Stoller does not remember his name but does recall when they were picked up the Jewish man was treated the same as everyone else. Stoller does not recall seeing him again after they were transported to Dulag Luft. The other fellow was Max Wolfe. Stoller remembers his name as he was also his roommate at Luft IV.

As the three men were discussing what to do when they saw two German women walking toward them. They hid. The women sat down and enjoyed a picnic lunch together. They did not realize their every action was being observed by the three Americans.

After the women left the three downed airmen continued their discussion about what to do. Stoller was studying the map from his escape kit. (The kit also contained 40 dollars in French money.) He was thinking about being in the plane and hearing over the intercom that they were crossing the Rhine River. He was thinking about how much time had past since that communication in order to determine where they were. They knew they were near an airbase as they could see the planes and the battle. They decided they were too far into enemy territory to escape. There would not be any resistance to assist them. They were worried about being found by civilians as they often beat and murdered enemy airmen. They decided to walk to the airbase and turn themselves in to the

Luftwaffe. They knew this would be the safest path to take. They had evaded capture for about 5 hours. As they were walking toward the airbase they were spotted by a farmer. He was sitting in a cart that was being pulled by oxen. He appeared to be supervising men who were digging a ditch. The farmer said, "For you the war is over." (did farmer say that or military personnel in motorcycle?) (Could the farmer speak English?) The men who were at work digging the ditch came toward the three men with pick axes. The men were visibly scared and the farmer tried to reassure them that they would be OK by saying, "Nein, nein." Soon a German officer arrived on motorcycle with a sidecar. He pulled out a Luger and told the men to march. They marched. They were marched to the airfield. Stoller was asked to help load the wounded onto a truck. One of the wounded he was asked to move was Davis. So, now he knew he was alive!

Someone said "Why do you want to come over here? Don't you have enough?" **Ask Stoller who said that.**

Stoller noted that the fighter base was very well camouflaged. It looked like a big dairy farm. All the planes were parked around the perimeter near the trees so they could not be seen from the air. There was just a small grass strip.

Interrogation: Stoller was in the habit of carrying a stud bolt (a little tool) with him on every mission in case ??? The German's were very interested in this and kept asking him what it was for. He was asked about it over and over. Stoller knew that it was nothing of any importance but he played dumb.

"The interrogator could speak better English than I can. Also, he knew more about the raid than I did." The guard said to Stoller, "Your fighter escort was a little late wasn't it.?" The interrogator also knew where Stoller was from in the states and some personal information.

Luft IV

Mean Guards Big Stoop and Scar Face. Scar Face smoked American cigarettes

One of Stoller's roommates was Max Wolfe, one of the fellows he was captured with on May 12th. Max was planning to attend Columbia University when he returned home

Humorous story told by Stoller: Big Stoop always patrolled the grounds wearing a white coat. He carried a stick with a nail in the end. Used for cleaning up any debris.

Mertz – one of Stoller's roommates was sleeping on the ground outside. Big Stoop came up and stabbed him with the nail end of his stick. Mertz jumped about three feet in the air. What a way to wake up!

Big Stoop was huge. Whenever he stood next to other German guards he appeared to be 2-3 feet taller. He abused prisoners. He was famous for taking his huge hands and slapping prisoner's ears. This would cause severe pain and would sometimes rupture eardrums.

Dad's story:

Once a young guard was searching dad's room. As room leader, Dad was asked to remain behind to witness the search. The guard came across a collection of political cartoons that dad had cut from the German newspaper. At one time this newspaper was distributed to the prisoners (name of the paper is not recalled). The guard was really enjoying himself, laughing out loud at the cartoons. He asked dad to watch the door and let him know if any other guard was coming. He wanted time to enjoy the funnies without getting into trouble. One cartoon in particular that dad recalls showed a colored man piloting a P-47 strafing women and children. The caption read, "Chicago gangster, killer of kinder and frau."

Stoller and dad both recall a German sergeant that was very nice. Was bombed every night (Stoller recalls that this soldier's home was destroyed and his family killed.) When he returned he wasn't nice anymore.

Dad recalls. At first the guards were very nice. Perhaps they were trying to get information. They would often come into their room and look at the map they had hung on the wall. Dad and his roommates were marking where the front lines were. The Germans would come in and look. Sometimes they would shake their heads and say, "Nein, Nein." Then they would return the next day perhaps and nod, "Ya, Ya." The prisoners would get information about where the front was from the downed airmen who were continuously coming into camp. Also there was a hidden radio in camp. Every day someone would come by and give you the gin (news) from the BBC. Stoller tells how there was a pre-tuned radio hidden in a softball.

Once Stoller got paid. He still has two pieces of camp money. He doesn't know why he was paid. Non-comp officers cannot do work and therefore do not get paid. Once a guard came by and paid some of the men. They had to sign for it. It was a worthless effort as there was no place to spend the money and nothing to buy. Some camps had canteens where prisoners could redeem their camp money. Luft IV never had a canteen. *(Dad never got paid. He was very surprised to hear about such a thing. According to Stoller whenever he shows his money at a veterans meeting where there are other Luft IV POW's he is met with the same surprise.)*

Stoller went into the camp when it was new. He was prisoner number 1185. That means he was the 185th prisoner who entered Luft IV.

Religion: When Stoller was first in Stalag Luft IV he was in Lager A. There was a man who had been studying to become a minister. He started conducting a Sunday service. As he didn't have a Bible he borrowed the pocket size New Testament and Psalms that Stoller carried throughout the war. He said he was never without it from beginning to end. He showed me the Bible, still tucked away with his other mementos from this time

in his life. Inside the pages is a razor blade that was once given him by a German guard. Sixteen men were meant to shave with this razor.

A scary time:

Once a German lineman was up on a post working on the wires. He got electrocuted. Some of the POW's standing near by witnessed this and one of them began to laugh. Immediately the guard in the tower turned his machine gun on the prisoners-sweeping in back and forth in a threatening manner. Everyone quickly scattered. Stoller ran and hid under the closest barracks for protection. Then he remembered that you were not supposed to be under any barracks. The POW's had been warned they could be shot for that infraction. The only thing to do is to get up and run. As he was running he could practically feel bullets entering his body. Fortunately no one was shot but everyone felt they could have been. Your fate is always at the whim of the guards.

Other time a POW was shot.

He was outside cutting another prisoners hair. He wanted something from his room and as he was near the window he decided to crawl in to retrieve it. As he was crawling back out the window a guard shot him. At first they left the body where it fell and would not let the other prisoners do anything about it . After a while they put the body in the mess hall. Many buzzards began to fly overhead. They finally had to get rid of the body.

On the death march

Combines: On the march combines were formed where men stuck together to help each other. These combines often combined there food. Sometimes one man was given the food to carry so that it could be divided later. The problem was that the combines kept getting split up. Every morning the guards would have the prisoners line up and then they would count them off and then assign them to a group. One group would go one way and another group would go another way. Sometimes the person with the food would be assigned to another group. The men who had planned to share it would go without.

Soup kitchen:

Once on the march a soup kitchen arrived. There was a long, long line of men waiting for a mere cup of soup. Stoller stood in that line. When there were just three people in front of him they ran out of soup. This is a story he still tells with an expression of disbelief.

There was no privacy on the march. The guards did not allow bathroom breaks. When you had to go to the bathroom you just did it wherever you were. Sometimes had to go right in front of women or children. This was a way the guards could humiliate the prisoners.

How Stoller survived the march. During the last week of the march Stoller found some sugar beet pulp in a barn. He ate some and then he filled his pockets. Sugar beets have a high energy content. Having that pulp is probably what allowed him to survive.

Right before liberation Stoller was held in a pottery factory near the front. Every time the bombs exploded the pottery factory would shake and pieces of plaster would fall from the walls and the ceiling.

Close call on the march: Somehow one of the POW's got a hold of a can of meat that belonged to one of the guards. The guard drew his grease gun (machine gun that looks like the type of grease gun you would use in a garage) and pointed it at the prisoners. He said, "I'm going to start shooting unless I get my meat back." There were a few anxious moments until, suddenly, a can of meat rolled to the front of the group.

During march: Swindemunde: Only time dad remembers witnessing an air raid from the ground.

During march. An old German guard wearing the uniform of the Wehremarche was having a difficult time keeping up with the march. One day he wasn't there. Another guard called him a grandfather and said he couldn't march anymore.

Liberation

Stoller was liberated at Bitterfeld. He walked over a bridge, on one side he was a prisoner and on the other side he was free. The prisoners and the guards changed places. Stoller has a picture of the bridge he walked over to freedom. Stoller and the other POW's are now the guards and they are marching the German guards. Allied soldiers, were sitting in a jeep near the bridge. Stoller thought they were sleeping. As they passed the jeep one of the German's was giving Stoller a hard time. One of the *sleeping* soldiers in the jeep had a recommendation for Stoller, "Shoot the son of the bitch."

Dad shared his story about the Americans cooking a goose in a five gallon can. These men also had a motorcycle and knew where to sneak out under the fence to go foraging. This took place at Stalag 357- where he was at the end of the march.

Also at that camp one day dad was standing outside a barrack when suddenly a plane (what kind) came swooping in low and appeared to be coming straight toward him. A missile was dropped and flew right over dad's head and landed behind him. Unbeknownst to dad, a group of German soldiers were camped behind the POW camp hoping this would afford them some kind of protection.

(End notes)

Detwiler's dad was a college professor

Grandma was in touch with the families of all the crew who were MIA and POW. They stopped staying in touch after the war.

Souvenir book of Walter V. Lawrence
Stalag 345
Fallingbistel, Germany
1945

Notes

Arrived at Stalag 357 on March 29, 1945

(We heard Holmark Hospital was Liberated). I Went in hospital at 357 on April 2. The group I was with from Stalag Luft IV left camp on 6th of April (approx). Left hospitalized patients behind. Was liberated on April 16, 1945 at 11:20 AM by the British, 11th Armored Division. Was able to get my mug in several news reel pictures for (Movie Tone News).

White bread issued was on April 17. Tasted like angel food cake. Has just been announced that some patients are leaving this afternoon and some tomorrow from this ward. Those left are to leave next. More white bread to be issued today, April 18.

South African (Meyers) gave me a fountain pen and cigarette lighter for souvenir. Ate four bites of a pork chop. Received ¼ loaf white bread in place of ¼ loaf black bread (jerry ration).

April 20, 1944 preparing to leave 357 (30 Americans) awaiting delousing. Left via English lorry . (truck) at 2:00 PM (Fallingbistel) through Nurnburg (80 Kilos) had good English field rations for supper. Slept in tents. A band played outside our tent, all old tunes we used to know. Among which was, "Take Me Back to Texas", "New York, New York", and many others. Suppose to leave at 8:30 in the morning on April 21. Had porridge, bread, butter, cheese, beans, tea, and chopped ham for breakfast.

Left via lorry (truck) at approximately 8:30. Arrived at airport about 10:15 AM. Had tea and cake, cookies, (N.A.R.F.I.?) We are now waiting our C-47's to come in now. We do not know our destination at present.

Left airport near Osneburk?, Germany, about 3:40 PM. Destination unknown. We thought Brussels, Belgium, but was changed to go directly to London. We arrived in London, England at 6:10 PM (English coast at 5:50).

The English Red Cross welcomed us with tea and cakes, music in a large hangar with chairs and tables. We registered, went to a lounge to wait for our transportation. Plenty of company and someone out of a different world (seemingly to speak to). You are almost scared to open your mouth. They greeted us well. We got on an ambulance, went to the hospital at Oxford, got deloused, and good hot shower, p.j.'s, food, clean sheets. Was certainly wonderful. On the 22nd we had a swell breakfast. Am taking it easy today. We are to be in quarantine for 14 days. Then???

Detachment of Patients
USA Hospital Plant
4143 APO 204
C/O PM NY NY

New York, NY

We were given \$50 by the Red Cross. We had chicken for dinner the next day. Sure is good to listen to a radio again. (Song playing was, "Don't Fence Me In".)

War capute on 2:00 PM, May 7. Left VE Day, May 8, for London by train. Churchill to make speech at 3:00 PM. King Edward to speak at 6:00 PM.

We went to Hyde Park, St. James Park, King's Palace, and Queen Victoria statue faces east towards India. We were told Westminster Abby was 900 years old.

(notes for future ref) Arrived at Holmark Hospital July 6, . Was there to the 16th of '44. Minengen on July 18th arriving Obermassfeldt on 25th of '44. August 18 we left Obermassfeldt for Luft 4, arriving August 21. We were there until February 6 of '45. Arrived at Stalag 357 on March 29. Was there until April 21.)

We're on the way home now. We left Dock #45 on the morning of May the 17th, on boat in the harbor until May 19th at 6:00 PM, 1945. Destination New York, I hope.

5-10-45, we are in convoy and the water is a little rough. We saw the first effects of sea sickness. I have not felt any as yet.

5-21-45

Just a little dizzy when I walk around too much but feel OK in the bed. Anticipating this tub, the SS John Ericsson, sister ship they say to the Gripsholm (hospital ship during WWII) to get me to the USA by my birthday on May 30.

5-22-45

This sea is much calmer now and everyone is feeling much better. We are eating three good meals a day which is a special privilege for ex-POW's. On most troop ships only two good meals a day is the limit. The port we left in England was Southampton.

5-23-45

Just finished eating breakfast. Feeling swell.

5-24-45

Saw a school of sharks.

5-25-56

Saw a movie, Abbot and Castello, in "It Ain't Hay".

5-26-45

Getting anxious to see the old lady with the torch. This tub is too slow to suit me. (14 knotts) Not much to do except sleep.

5-27-45

A slow quiet day.

5-28-45

Feeling fine. Blackout on the Atlantic was lifted at 2100 hours tonight. We will be the first convoy to reach the states after the Atlantic blackout was lifted. I met Arthur Hewitt (from neighboring town, of League City TX.) on board today and hardly recognized him and he didn't remember me at all until I told him who I was. We are supposed to dock tomorrow afternoon.

5-29-45

Saw New York about noon. Arrived in the port at 5:15 docking at Pier 84. (Had a Memorial Day Parade with all the trimmings, ticker tape and confetti out of windows in the tall buildings as we marched down the street)

5-30-45

Thirty minutes to form up in the area. Time to have baggage out of barracks. Have a four man detail to load the same, climb aboard and load on the train. We left Camp Shanks about 6:00 PM. Passed West Point. Pretty scenery along the Hudson.

(on board ship)

2 cartons cigarettes	.50
1 box matches	.10
Hershey Almond bar, per carton	.72
O'Henry bar, per carton	.72
Cookies	.16
Peanuts	.17
Toothpaste	?

(arrived home around the 2nd of June, 1945 with 60 day furlough in hand)

HONORED LIFE SERVICE NOTES

Lawrence Lee Witt was born on June 1, 1923 in Detroit, Michigan.

His parents were Dale and Gladys (Beebe) Witt. Lawrence's father was out of his life by the time he was just three years old. Gladys, as a single mother, worked as a cook to support her sons.

Lawrence spent his early years in the busy Detroit Neighborhood of Corktown. As a young boy he would entertain passersby by dancing in order to earn enough money to buy a three-cent cherry pie. Pie remained Lawrence's favorite dessert throughout his life. As a boy he also earned money cleaning golf balls and carrying luggage at the train station (until he was chased away by the porters, that is).

Lawrence had two siblings: his brother, Walter, was five years older and his half-sister, Jeannette, was thirteen years younger.

When very young, Lawrence and his brother were boarded while their single mother worked to provide for them. During this very difficult period they only had short visits with their mother on weekends. In 1929, when Lawrence's mother married Fred Collins she went straight from the courthouse to retrieve her beloved sons. Thereafter this family lived in a quiet, shady neighborhood in northwest Detroit.

While a student at Holcomb Elementary School, in Northwest Detroit, Lawrence had fond memories of spending long days exploring the city with his friends and playing pick-up baseball at the nearby playground. After grammar school, Lawrence attended the Henry Ford Trade School and after graduation took college courses at Lawrence Technological Institute.

During WWII Lawrence answered his country's call by enlisting in the Army Air Forces. After training as a B-17 flight engineer he was based with the Eighth Air Force, 96th Bomb Group, in Snetterton, England. On May 12, 1944, during his seventh mission, his plane was shot down over Germany. On that fateful day, five of his crewmates were killed in action and Lawrence, along with four others, became prisoners of war. During his eleven month incarceration Lawrence endured many hardships. A forced march in the dead of winter on starvation rations caused his health to greatly deteriorate. He weighed a mere eighty-seven pounds upon liberation. For his service during WWII Lawrence was awarded the Air Medal, Victory Medal, Prisoner of War Medal and a Purple Heart.

As a teenager Lawrence was a member of Redford Baptist Church where, during youth group activities, he met his future wife Lois Davis. They were married on January 26, 1946 in the same church. They first settled on Sussex Street in Detroit where they welcomed their first child, Laura, in 1947. The family then purchased Lawrence's childhood home on Karl Street in Detroit. Here their middle daughter Ellen came along in 1956. Lawrence and Lois finally settled in Farmington Hills, Michigan where they welcomed their final daughter Ruth in 1962.

Lawrence most enjoyed the out-of doors and treated his family to annual camping vacations. He taught his daughters to appreciate nature as together they hiked the many trails of Ludington State Park watching for animals and beautiful vistas. Later vacations involved walking Florida beaches and collecting countless shells.

Lawrence had a long and satisfying career with Ford Motor Company where he was employed as a metallurgist research technician in the Scientific Research Laboratory. Here he developed many new manufacturing processes and was awarded a number of patents.

Sadly, in 1996, after fifty years of marriage, Lawrence lost his first wife Lois. But, he was soon blessed with his second wife, Josephine. They made a beautiful home in Wixom, Michigan that was surrounded by splendid award-winning gardens.

Lawrence received great joy from many things during the course of his life. He was blessed by a large, loving family and loyal friends. His life was also enriched by his many amusing and affectionate pets. Most of all he cherished time spent with his grandchildren Robert, Andrew, Kari, Devin, Davis, Katie, and Maggie. He was proud to welcome his first and only great-grandchild, Scott, in 2008.

Lawrence will always be remembered by his family for his unwavering love and support, his deep appreciation for nature's beauty, and his kindness and humor.