

# Leova Tellez Urias

## Ex-Prisoner of War Reveals Story

*By Amy Bauer*

**By the age of 20, Leova Tellez Urias had already experienced segregation, the affects of the Great Depression, battle at the front lines during World War II and imprisonment by German soldiers. Now, at age 76, he looks back on his experiences.**

**Born September 28, 1925, Leova, known to his friends as L.T., he grew up in Sonora, Texas with his parents, Jesus and Leocadia, and a house full of sisters, four to be exact. Mr. Urias. said that this was quite an adventure. "At times it got pretty hectic," he said laughing. But by the grace of God, and a lot of tolerance, Mr. Urias. survived. A religious man, he. attended weekly service at First Baptist Church. "We're a Christian family," said Mr. Urias. "My mother told us how to go to church."**

**Mr. Urias spent his school days at L.W. Elliott High School. It was here that he was faced with his first taste of discrimination. His classmates were all Hispanics. "We were segregated from the whites the Anglos," said Mr. Urias. "They wouldn't let us go to the Anglos' high school." The classes were also all taught in English. Even after returning from war, no real changes had been made in the school system. "I came back from the war in 1946 and it was still segregated," said Mr. Urias.**

**When the Great Depression struck in 1929, many families suffered from economic decline. Fortunately L.T.'s father kept his steady job as a janitor. "We were kind of lucky because my dad had a good job," said Mr. Urias. We didn't have much, but we were better off than most of 'em." But this marked only the beginning of the hard times for America because World War II was just about to strike the states.**

**The U.S. had been trying to remain neutral despite the fighting happening around the world. However, in July of 1939, German soldiers hit our merchant ships causing us to take action. In September of 1940, Congress passed the Armed Forces Conscript Bill. This allowed us to set aside money to activate the military. Opposing countries can see that the U.S. may become a threat, so the Japanese decide to take action themselves. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor, completely destroying our entire pacific fleet.**

**L.T. remembers hearing about this devastating event. "We just heard that Sunday morning that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor and we didn't even know where Pearl Harbor was," said Mr. Urias. Even though L.T. wasn't familiar with where Pearl Harbor was located, he didn't care. "We were all motivated--wanting to go and fight for our country." Mr. Urias wouldn't have long to wait. On December 8th, the US and Britain declared war on the Japanese. L.T. was drafted in November of 1943. He was inducted into the Fort Sam Houston Army. From there he went on to do his basic training at Camp Glendon in Florida. The training consisted of bayonet practice, crawling under barbed wire and maneuvering through a series of obstacle courses. "I think we spent about 13 weeks of infantry training," said Mr. Urias. "We were pretty lucky. Some men didn't get much training."**

After weeks of preparation, the officers decided to hold back the boys who were not quite 19 as long as possible. Instead of going straight to war, Mr. Urias, who was only 18 at the time was transferred to the **106th Infantry Division at Camp Atterbury, Indiana**. This detour didn't last long. L.T. along with about 12,000 others in his Division made their first move in October of 1943. They boarded the Aquatania and made the long journey across the Atlantic. The conditions on the boat were terrible. "They fed us sauerkraut for breakfast," reports Mr. Urias. "It didn't stand too good on our stomachs. We got sea sick and we made it on candy bars."

Once on land, the 106th Division posted up in Gloscoe to engage in more training. This time, training only lasted for a month. Then finally in December, the troops made their way to France. "It was during the winter and it was cold. Our truck broke down so we got separated from our company. We had about 10 inches of snow. Never had seen snow like that," said Mr. Urias.

After arriving in France, L.T. discovered that the 106th Division had received orders to relieve the 2nd Infantry Division. "They had been on assignment there for awhile. They had built bunkers with some bricks and logs so they were pretty well protected there," said Mr. Urias.

It was time for him to face the war head on. Armed with a Browning Automatic Rifle (B\*A\*R), he made his way to the front lines. "We had been there about 4 days and on December 16 of '43 that's when the Germans made that push," remembers Mr. Urias. "That was known as the Battle of the Bulge."

Mr. Urias said that the battle was quite a blow to the 106th Division. "Two of our regiments got hit pretty hard," said Mr. Urias. Most of them got captured but mine went on to the 4th week. We managed to get out of there and retreat to the rear." The energy of the day, although intense, was far different from that at night. After sundown, the troops would move back about 100 yards from the designated front lines. "We'd go back at night because we know we didn't want to get surrounded," he said.

Although the American troops were fairly well armed, they were no match for the enemy. Mr. Urias said, "They were pretty superior in arms. They had machine gun fire a whole lot faster than ours—about twice as fast. We'd hit them with our 75 millimeters and they'd just bounce off of 'em."

After weeks at the front lines, the 2nd Armor Division relieved L.T. and his troops. It was at this point that the Germans captured L.T. With back up holding strong at the front lines, a few men from the 106th Division were given orders to capture some German soldiers and interrogate them. Mr. Urias said, "We went behind their lines but were stopped by machine gun power. We tried a different route and the same thing. Instead of capturing them they got us. Finally our leader surrendered."

Mr. Urias clearly remembers the moment he knew he was about to be taken captive by the Germans. "They were wearing white capes that blended in with the snow. We couldn't tell where they were," he said. He and his men were forced to surrender. "They took our rifles and stuff—some rings and watches and even our snow shoes," said Mr. Urias. The German soldiers shuffled the men to Gerilsdine. "They took us to a castle about 4-5 miles from the front lines," said Mr. Urias. "We were half scared."

**The soldiers spent both day and night for about two weeks interrogating the American troops. Lack of response meant maltreatment. Once again, L.T. suffered poor eating conditions. He recalls, "They didn't hardly feed us anything at all, maybe a slice of bread and sometimes muddy soup. At first I didn't much like it, but after about the 3rd day, I started sipping on it."**

**This stint in Gerilsdine lasted only about two weeks. L.T. and his fellow men were then transported to Limberg. Here the conditions were much the same. L.T. was fed only once a day around noon. "I remember when we were marching towards the camp, I swapped my knit sweater for about a half a loaf of bread and a jar of marmalade jelly," said Mr. Urias.**

**He stayed in Limberg until the 29th of March until liberated by the 6th Armor Division. The men were put on a train leave their German imprisons. Here L.T. met captives who had suffered far worse than he. "I remember that they had some Polish prisoners that had been there for like 4-5 years," said Mr. Urias. There was still one problem with the rescue, the captives were put on a German train and from the sky, American soldiers cannot tell whose men are aboard. "As soon as it got daylight, we got strified by our own fighters because they didn't know were in there," he said. Luckily, no one was seriously injured and the train moved safely on.**

**L.T. was taken to a field hospital in Paris, France to recover from the malnutrition. He weighed 190 when entering the war. "I lost about 50 lbs," said Mr. Urias. "I weighed myself in Paris at the General Hospital and I weighed about 140." He spent about two weeks in the hospital, getting plenty of rest and quite a few shots of whiskey.**

**Not long after, L.T. found out the war had come to an end, and was released to return to his country. "I can't remember the ship we came back in. I remember we got back to the states on May the 5th, that's Mexican Independence Day," said L.T. "We were sailing right by the Statue of Liberty. It was beautiful.**

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