

# 1LT Ormond Armstrong Roberts

1913 – 2005

## EARLY YEARS AND MILITARY SERVICE



1937

*Ormond Armstrong Roberts, the son of parents, Joseph C. and Mary Louise (nee Armstrong), was born on June 14, 1913. He attended Dover High School then the University of New Hampshire, graduating in 1937. He then enlisted in the U.S. Army in February 1942 and saw service in North Africa. He was a First Lieutenant in the 168<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 34<sup>th</sup> Division when captured in February 1943 at the battle of Sidi Bou Zid in Tunisia and taken via Naples and the Brenner Pass, initially to a British blesse [specifically blessed/purposed] camp for a while and eventually to Oflag 64, prisoner-of-war camp in Schubin, Poland.*

**Source:** *Ormond A. Roberts Papers, 1942 – 2000, MC179, Milne Special Collection and University of New Hampshire Library, Durham, NH, USA.*

## LIFE AT OFLAG 64

After arriving on 9 June 1943 and enduring the processing-in regiment within this newly commissioned camp for American Ground Officers, Ormond was assigned to Room 20 in the building known as the White House. The establishment of a routine is an important step when enduring life behind barbed wire walls and over the weeks that followed, he noted that camp strolls and sport activities involved many of his fellow Kriegies (in addition to the daily need for footwear) and both required shoes. Most, he discovered, needed repair, so in August of 1943, he found his calling.

## THE CAMP COBBLER

Excerpts from the following article appeared in *The Oflag 64 Item, Altburgund, Germany – February 1, 1944.*

*“Ex-Steak Slicer Now Saves Kriegies’ Soles”*

*Located on the East side of Oflag 64 stands a weather-wrinkled old shack known as the Cobbler Shop. Lt. Ormond Roberts heads the concern. The former salesman and meat-cutter for Swift and Co. learned his new trade at Oflag 9 A/Z.*

*“We handle all kinds of shoe repairing,” he said breezily. “Nothing to it. After all there’s not much difference between hacking up a tough hunk of beef and a piece of leather. We take care of 10 to 15 pair of shoes a week.”*

*With compulsory weekly walks, Roberts predicts a rise in business.*

According to J. Frank Digg’s book, *Americans Under the Barbed Wire*, Roberts later received additional help from Lts. Art Bryant and Henry Desmond. *“All of this was performed with the help of an antiquated German sanding and buffing machine.”* (p. 50)

Two Kriegie Lieutenants, Howard “Boomer” Holder and George Durgin had particular interest in the cobbler shop.

*The shoe shop was in the same building as the tailor shop. In fact, it was in the same room. The equipment was antiquated and dilapidated, but still the American Kriegies, under the direction of Lt. Ormond Roberts from Dover, New Hampshire, operated it to good advantage. The shop’s weekly output amounted to about fifteen pairs, which is astounding considering the difficulties under which the men worked. For their repair work they had only bits of leather from worn out shoes which had been turned in for salvage. Sometimes they got leather through the Red Cross or the Y.M.C.A. and they did a near professional job.*

*It is surprising to see how much shoe leather one can wear from walking eight to ten miles every day. George and I were preparing for an escape, and our training entailed such walks to get in shape for our proposed journey. Thus we were constant customers at the shoe shop; and although they shouted in good-natured humor disgust every time we came in sight, they always fixed our shoes so that we could continue our preparations. Our friends who worked in the shop were Lts. Art Bryant, Jr. from Princeton, Illinois, Richard “Dick” Englehart (called “Geezle the Gobbler” because he gobbled shoes) from Davenport, Iowa, and Henry Desmond. There was a constant struggle with the Goons the entire time we were in Szubin to get more supplies for these shops [tailor and shoe]. They were continually threatening to take this or that tool or machine away from us if we didn’t do exactly as they wished in the shops. However, we always managed to come through on top some way. I believe that a lot of our success was due to the fact that our policy toward the Germans was exceedingly strong in the early days of our prison life, under the command of S.A.O. Col. T.D. Drake. (p. 102)*

**Source:** *ESCAPE TO RUSSIA* by Howard Randolph Holder

Oflag 64  
Alzburgund, Germany  
20 December 1944

SUBJECT: Award of Y.M.C.A. Medals.

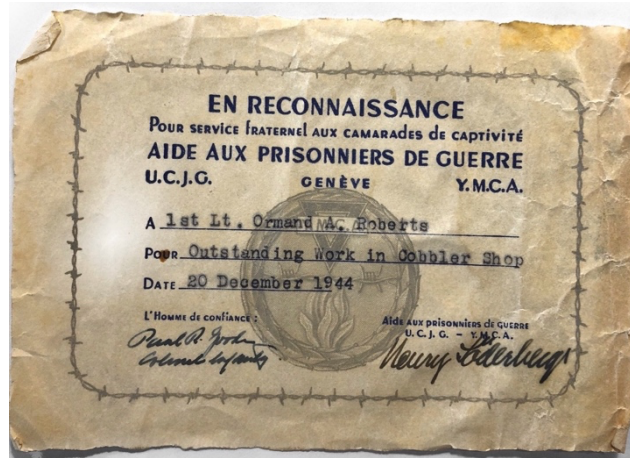
TO : All Officers Concerned.

1. The following officers are hereby awarded the Y.M.C.A. Medal for Fraternal Service to Comrades in Prisoner-of-war Camps in recognition of their outstanding and meritorious services in their various activities and for their commendable performance of their duties:

1. Capt. Tony B. Lumpkin - - - Parcel Room.
2. 2 Lt. Robert L. Aschim - - - Camp Mess.
3. 1 Lt. John L. Creech - - - Greenhouse and Garden.
4. 2 Lt. Jesse F. Diggs - - - News Service.
5. 1 Lt. Leroy C. Ihrie - - - Camp Library.
6. 2 Lt. L.W. Otterbein, Jr. - Stage Construction.
7. 2 Lt. Robert Rankin - - - Orchestra.
8. 1 Lt. Ormand A. Roberts - - - Cobbler Shop.
9. W. O. Carl F. Coffey - - - Camp Service.
10. W. O. Austin L. Knapp - - - Tailor Shop.

*Paul R. Goode*

PAUL R. GOODE  
Colonel, U.S. Army  
Senior American Officer.



Source: Oflag 64 Remembered files

## LIBERATION AND CIVILIAN LIFE

In total, Ormond Roberts had spent 27 months as a P.O.W. and was evacuated in January 1945 when he and the other inmates were marched to Southern Germany. He was liberated on May 9, 1945 in GAZ (Bavaria Hospital Zone) and returned to the US onboard a Liberty ship.

**Source:** *Guide to Ormond A. Roberts Papers 1942 – 2000*

Commensurate with his departure from the military, Roberts followed the most sought-after elements of civilian life often mentioned in Kriegy letters and conversations--family life and occupation. He became an independent insurance adjuster for the next 20 years and pursued a marriageable partner.

He and his wife, Dorothy Ethel Baker, married in 1946, and after their 47-year marriage, she passed away in 1993. Ormond Armstrong Roberts died twelve years later on May 10, 2005 and is buried near his wife in New Town Cemetery, Rollinsford, New Hampshire.



1987 DC Reunion

**Source:** *Findagrave.com*



## GUIDE TO THE ORMOND A. ROBERTS PAPERS 1942 - 2000

The University of New Hampshire Library houses impressive, specialized materials concerning the life experiences of Ormond Roberts.

Inclusions:

*Series I Papers, 1942 – 2000, Box 1 Folders 1 - 12*

Of special interest is a letter found in Box 1, Folder 1:

*Typed letter to Ormond A. Roberts dated June 11, 1945 from Col. Thomas Drake, War Department, Washington, D.C., and countersigned by Col. John K. Waters and Captain Stephen Kane, chaplain, recommending Roberts for the Bronze Star Medal.*

*(Roberts has appended a note “no action was ever taken.”) Also carbon copy of same and envelope.*

*Series II Items, 1944 – 1997, Box 1, Folder 13, Box 2, Item 1*

*Content descriptions: The collection consists of correspondence, four notebook diaries by Roberts during his imprisonment, three publications concerning Oflag 64; an oral history account by Gen. John K. Waters of his experience in the camp (1980); Roads to Liberation from Oflag 64 by Clarence R. Meltesen (1987); and Oflag 64: The Fiftieth Anniversary Book (1993); material from annual reunions of Oflag 64 inmates and a collection of artifacts.*

**Sources:** *Ormond A. Roberts Papers, 1942-2000, MC 179, Milne Special Collections and University of New Hampshire Library, Durham, NH, USA.*

## **FAMILY CONNECTIONS**

Military service to the nation ran deep in families during the Second World War and it was not unusual for them to have more than one member in the U.S. Armed Forces.

This was certainly true for the Roberts family as they counted two male first-cousins (their fathers were brothers) who served in the ranks and lived across the road from one another on Roberts Road in Rollinsford Township, New Hampshire.

Hall Scott Roberts served in the European theatre. As a U.S. Army Captain, he was assigned to Headquarters, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 424<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division before being captured by the Germans in late October 1944. Incarcerated first at Stalag 12A then Stalag 9B Limburg An Der Lahn Hessen-Nassau, Prussia 50-08, Captain Roberts lost his life on December 23, 1944, when his POW camp was bombed. The cause of this tragedy is not known.

Ormond, who was in ROTC during his college days at University of New Hampshire, received his Lieutenant's bars before taking additional training in Ireland then proceeding to North Africa in May of 1942. As stated above, he was captured in Tunisia and in February of 1943 and spent the next two-plus years in Oflag 64, Szubin, Poland.

Both cousins, more like brothers, who served their country with honor and courage, are buried among other family members at New Town Cemetery, Rollinsford, New Hampshire.