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Summary

Roy Bigger was a 24-year-old Corporal assigned to the Regimental Headquarters Company of the 423rd Infantry Regiment, who was taken prisoner by the Germans. He relates about his experience of a forced march organized by the Germans, in February 1945, during one of the harshest European winters, leading the prisoners from a POW Camp in Fuerstenberg on the Oder River to the Buchenwald Concentration Camp, in order to preclude being overrun by the Russian Army. The march was an endurance problem, with one prisoner shot thru the head, many beaten as they sought some rest during the 2 ½ days of constant marching and those who remained on the ground, trampled by the horses of the SS guards riding in the rear of the column consisting of over 2,000 US prisoners of war. The Fuerstenberg camp had prisoners from many allied nations but was not an extermination camp. While it was harsh in the camp, it was not in the same category as Concentration Camps; a vivid comparison was seen when the POW's encountered a column of Concentration Camp inmates during their forced march. Those Jewish prisoners were in a much more perilous condition and all were in terrible shape. The POW's felt sorry for them, were angered by their plight, but of course helpless to do anything on their behalf.

Roy remembers this march along with an incident in December 1944 when the POW's, shipped in box cars, were bombed by British planes, a raid which killed about 100 of them, as his worst experiences in the war. He had a difficult time adjusting after he had been freed and released, after spending a couple of weeks in the hospital in Camp Lucky Strike, in France. There were blank spots in his memory and he was under gag orders about his POW experience. Under those conditions he failed to get adequate treatment, until 1981 when things eased, as the wall of silence was broken and he was called back for treatment. In 1987 these matters were declassified and Roy went to the Archives where he found out that his march had been classified as a war crime. By 1994 he was much improved and could attend a POW movie without a problem, something he could never have done in prior years.