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Summary

Robert Black was a 22-year-old Staff Sergeant when he was taken prisoner by the Germans during World War II. During an 18-day march from his Stalag 17 B prison camp, he encountered a group of about 24 men in concentration camp garb coming from the opposite direction. The concentration camp prisoners were more emaciated than the POWs and they apparently wanted some cigarettes. Robert picked out one prisoner and gestured to him and as they passed by, he handed over a pack. Unfortunately, it was seen by the German guard and the comments from a fellow POW were: "You almost got us all shot". It was a close call and the prisoner probably did not get to keep the cigarettes. Up the road, they passed the Mauthausen Concentration Camp. The Camp had a high stone wall, but the gate was open and he could see the prisoners working. He understood that there were political prisoners and Jews in the camp. On the other side of the road, he noticed blotches of blood and he could tell that people had been shot there. The march continued on. Along the way, he saw very few civilians, people did not stay to watch, they went into their houses. The POWs were all starved on their march, with hardly any food along the way.

Robert was promoted to Tech Sergeant before his discharge. Upon returning home, he had a hard time adjusting. He had bad dreams and he hated the Germans. He thought of them as arrogant and hated the language and had never made an attempt to learn it. He could not really talk to his family about his experiences. His mother understood him more than his father, who only talked about his son being a POW and never talked about his prior service; he could talk more openly to his brother. He was able to tell his wartime stories when talking to veterans, particularly former POWs.

At his interview he agreed that he had somewhat gotten over his hating of the Germans, but he still found it painful to talk about the past.