

RG-50.759.0026

Summary

James Clark was a 22-year-old Staff Sergeant who had been assigned to the 305th Bomb Group, 66th Squadron of the 8th Air Force, flying out of England, when he became a Prisoner of War of the Germans. He and about 4,500 POW's were marching from POW Camp Stalag 17 westward, when resting along the road, they encountered a column of about 400 concentration camp inmates moving eastwards. It was a terrible sight; they were all emaciated, looking like skin and bones. Some of them were eating grass as they walked along, obviously starving. The concentration camp column also stopped. They were dressed in various forms of clothing, some in striped prison uniforms others in tattered civilian clothing and some without shoes. There were not many guards. One of the prisoners crossed the road and, using well educated English, explained that most of them were Hungarian Jews. While the POW's had lost about 30-40 lbs. during their imprisonment, these people had lost so much more weight. When asked where they were going, the Hungarian told them that this was the 4th time that they had passed the same spot and he had no idea of the destination. The POW's gave the Hungarian a number of packs of cigarettes and offered to let him stay within their column, but the Hungarian declined indicating that he could not do that. As the POW's continued on their march, they noticed that the Concentration Camp inmates at the rear of their column were in even worse shape and were being helped by other inmates; they heard shots in the distance and soon they saw about a dozen dead bodies along the road. The Americans could not believe that what they saw could be inflicted onto human beings. They were feeling frustrated in their inability to do anything about this.

A day later, from a place where they had camped, James saw groups of forced laborers, probably Russian, being moved along by guard with long whips, who used them across the laborer's backs whenever they felt that someone was too slow or out of line. They were apparently moving to work at a factory across the river, situated near the Mauthausen Concentration Camp. Groups were moved in the morning and in the evening, as the shifts were changing. The POWs worried among themselves if this could happen to them.

James remembered a separate incident, when he was on a train on a 4-day trip from Frankfurt to Stalag 17B. They had stopped at a siding and were preparing to eat at an outside a soup kitchen when another train pulled up, moving westward, and there was yelling and screaming and thru windows, they noted children being held up. The American Captain, the senior of the POW's, tried to inquire from the Germans what this was all about, but the only answer came when the soup kitchen was cancelled. They later theorized that these children were perhaps being brought back for medical experiments.