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Summary

Delbert Cooper was a 22-year-old Private First-Class soldier assigned to Headquarters Company of the 14th Regiment, 71st Infantry Division, when his unit was ordered into a satellite camp of the Mauthausen Concentration Camp, which was located at Gunskirchen in Austria. The sub-camp probably had 14,000 inmates.

Delbert, who had just joined his unit at Leombach (?), Austria, as an Infantry replacement, was requested by an Army Captain to accompany him to this sub-camp to bring some food. At a nearby rail station he noted a skin and bones young boy, about 14 years old, in striped prison garb, squatting against the structure; it was a forerunner of what he was about to see. Along the way on the highway there was a stream of emaciated inmates who had left the camp after its liberation the day before. A very strong odor greeted them as they neared the camp which was set up in the woods off the road. He was throwing cigarettes and gum at the prisoners as he passed them and they stopped near the gate which was now unguarded. There were about 100 dead prisoners strewn around the area. Almost all of the prisoners were grossly emaciated.; very few were to be seen inside the camp. Delbert was shocked at what he saw; he could not understand how anyone could treat people that way. There was one better-fed prisoner who spoke English and could thereby communicate with the prisoners; he had been assigned to work on a farm and thus received better nourishment. This fellow tried to keep other prisoners away from the Americans as they tried to touch them in their joy of liberation. Delbert almost felt threatened by the large group that approached, but he was not willing to allow the prisoners to be hit to keep them away. He wanted to inform the prisoners to stay off the road so that they would not be run over by the military convoys and not to eat too much which could kill those who had been starved. They encountered a German who was changing clothes and was identified as an SS guard; he indeed had his SS uniform under his trousers. While Delbert was encouraged by the prisoners to shoot him, he resisted that temptation and turned him, as well as other German soldiers, over to the MP's for evacuation.

Delbert never entered any of the buildings and soon moved on to the nearby town. In Austria the Americans were greeted almost like Liberators, which contrasted with the reception given by the civilians in Germany.

In his interview 50 years later, Delbert explained that he had worked with Displaced Persons as a Government employee after the war. He opined that in the beginning, Hitler had apparently started some good programs to rejuvenate the German economy, but his actions against the Jews were incomprehensible. He basically liked the Germans and felt that some of them knew less about what Hitler had done than what he knew, after visiting again the camp he helped liberate and Dachau and Auschwitz in later years.