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Summary

William Deierhoi was a 21-year-old soldier assigned to the 123rd Evacuation Hospital, when the unit was ordered into the Buchenwald Concentration Camp. William had heard of German atrocities, but he did not know what to expect. As he approached the camp, he noticed several bodies, dressed in striped garb, lying along the roadway. There were people in the same garb walking around inside and outside of the gate. When he entered a barracks, he saw these prisoners in the same garb, laying in bunk beds, emaciated to the point that they could not leave the barracks, many were dying. The freed prisoners at the gate were engaged in arranging transport to take them back to the place of their origin. Some were in better physical condition because they had worked on the outside, engaged in binocular manufacturing, which was famous in the nearby city of Weimar. He met one of the prisoners who spoke English and he told him that he came to the camp from Poland, carried by his father, in a sack over the shoulder, who did not want them to become separated. Many of the prisoners were political, not necessarily Jewish. William saw the crematorium which had a wooden fence around it and shockingly about 100 emaciated bodies lying nearby. Within the crematorium he found partially burned bodied in the ovens, there were four ovens on each of the two floors. William also saw lamp shades, made from human skin, by the wife of the commandant of the camp. It was hard to understand how such things could happen. Some of the citizens of Weimar were brought in to see what had been done in the camp. Most were stoic and somber, some seemed caring. William only stayed two days at the camp.

William talked about his experience when he returned home. He did not think that it affected him, but he did have confusing dreams at times with jumbled visions of the camp. The experience had disillusioned him about the basic goodness of mankind, he thought that this could happen anywhere, even in the States, under similar circumstances. He wanted to tell what he saw in the camp, because in a few years there will be no one alive who could personally talk about it.