

Oral history interview with James Gibson Hull Summary

In part one of this two-part interview, Gibson Hull recalls his military experience during World War II. He describes his childhood; his father was a banker and his grandfather a doctor. Graduating college in 1936, he describes his search for employment and some of his jobs. He relates that in his mind, Hitler was far away. Eventually he realized that he had a low draft number and joined the Georgia National Guard. He trained in Florida, "cleaning up swamps." He and his friends would go to Jacksonville for good food and were on their way there when Pearl Harbor was attacked; they left before the gates were closed and from that time, all leave was frozen. After training, he met a "charming lady" and knew he'd better get a commission. After Officers Candidate School, he was shipped overseas as a general's aide. He describes the crossing with no escort; they changed course every three minutes. He was stationed between Manchester and Liverpool. They had to go to Wales to get their guns calibrated and he describes the difficulty of moving them through the streets of Wales. They crossed the channel in a Liberty Ship, landing on Utah beach, which had been secured but they were still taking artillery fire. He describes their march across France and their encounters with the German 6th Army. He recalls how German artillery was horse-drawn, and that the stench was incredible. He describes an incident in which he was injured; he found the back of his Eisenhower jacket to be full of shrapnel holes. They were headed for Paris, but ordered to turn south; this would allow a French unit formed in England the honor of liberating Paris. He worked as a liaison officer to the press so he had a jeep and a radio; he also kept contact with the division on their left. He relates a time when his general was sick, so he had to go to a meeting in his place, and he had an encounter with George Patton. He recalls being impressed with Patton, that he knew tactics, but also relates that his troops were scared to death of him. He describes in great detail the Battle of the Bulge; the weather was so cold they couldn't hold on to their mess kits. The infantry marched alongside tanks to Bastogne; Patton called for the chaplains to pray for a break in the cold, foggy weather. When the weather broke, the planes were able to come in and that turned the tide. He recalls crossing the Rhine on pontoon bridges multiple times because his general forgot the maps. His parents were told he was on the cover of Life magazine, but his mother refused to believe it was him because he had a cigarette in his hands. He reports that the Germans were the best equipped army in the world, and that their 88s were the best gun. They reached the Czech border and turned toward the Austrian border when they received orders to cease fire. He had been given a pass to go to Switzerland, but gave it back, stating that he was going home.

In part two of this two-part interview, James Gibson Hull recalls his military experience during World War II. He describes in detail capturing German soldiers, touring a concentration camp with a pilot friend named Wayland, and liberating a prisoner of war camp. He recalls that he was unable to eat for three days after touring the concentration camp. His wife, who is present during the interview, recalls attending the 1936 Olympics in Germany and related that Hitler refused to distribute medals to American athletes. He recalls leaving LeHavre on a "creaky old boat" bound for the States. While on board, he saw a pilot friend, Murphy, drinking a glass of fresh milk. He drank one as well, and promptly vomited it, not having had fresh milk in two years. During the voyage, he was tasked with heading the troop train to South Carolina, discharging troops from Boston, New York, Washington, D.C., through to South Carolina. He was reunited with his wife in Augusta (Ga.). He describes the gift his wife's parents presented to him on his homecoming, which is shown during the interview. He relates receiving a Purple Heart and Bronze Star. He describes his friendship with Bobby Jones, and the trophy Jones' daughter gave him; Hull donated the trophy to the Sea Island Golf Club.

information source: Atlanta History Center
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