

# LEONARD ADAMS

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## LEONARD ADAMS

Today is May 12, 1994. My name is Sue Kasten. I am a volunteer with Midway Village & Museum Center and we are cooperating with a state-wide effort to collect oral histories from Illinois citizens that participated in World War II. We are at Midway Village today in Rockford, Illinois, and I'm with Leonard Adams who lives at—

**LEONARD:** 4360 Leighton Downs Drive, Rockford.

**SUE:** Rockford? Okay and Leonard served in a branch of the United States Armed Forces during World War II. We're here today to talk about his experiences in the war. Leonard, if you could give me first of all your name, your full name, and date and place of birth.

**LEONARD:** Leonard H. Adams and I was born in Bettendorf, Iowa—on a farm back there. What else did you want to know?

**SUE:** The place and date of birth.

**LEONARD:** Date of birth, June 19, 1921.

**SUE:** And your parents names?

**LEONARD:** Peter and Mary Adams.

**SUE:** And did you have any brothers and sisters?

**LEONARD:** I had two brothers. Neither one of them served in the service, but I had two brothers.

**SUE:** Okay. Let's start out with how you entered the military and what was your life like before 1941? Do you have any memories of what—

**LEONARD:** Yes, I lived on the farm and we also had quite a bit of timber and so we cut timber and sawed lumber on the farm also. And then I went to high school and after high school I went to a junior college over there in Elkader, Iowa. I went two years to that junior college. When I got out of there, I think in 1941, I looked for a teaching job and couldn't find one. Then the military draft started coming up and I knew

that I would have to answer the call to the military. So I had to sign up for the draft. I signed up and they drew lottery numbers. I drew a very high number which deferred me for about a year. Then about the time that my number was coming up, I wanted to have more choice, so I enlisted in what was known then as the U. S. Army Air Corps, so I enlisted on October 9th or something like that in 1942.

**SUE:** Did you have any thoughts about the United States getting involved in the conflict? You obviously had anticipated it because you were planning that in your future you would have to be in the military, but what thoughts did you have about the U. S. involvement at that point?

**LEONARD:** Well, I felt that it was necessary. It was one of those things that you just couldn't get around. That was it. That's what you were confronted with.

**SUE:** And how did you hear about the bombing of Pearl Harbor? Did you remember how you heard about that?

**LEONARD:** Yes, I remember. We were quite news conscious. We always had the radio on and we got the daily paper from Dubuque, Iowa. That was our town. But we heard it on the radio first, see? And we heard of the bombing of Pearl Harbor and of course it was no great shock because there were so many controversies going on at the time You could expect anything and so when it really happened it wasn't really too much of a shock it was just, "We were going to get into this thing and now we're in it."

**SUE:** And you heard it over the radio?

**LEONARD:** Yes! It was on the radio.

**SUE:** Had you formed any prior opinion to that about what had been taking place in Asia—as far as expansion or—were you aware of that?

**LEONARD:** Oh, yes, yes. The Japanese were going into—over in China mostly there. I believe it was Chenault or somebody like that who had these Flying Tigers over there in China. They frightened the Japanese over there so the Japanese were expanding out into that area and then just before Pearl Harbor there was one of the Japanese ministers over here in Washington and he was in kind of a conflict with the administration, you know, and wanted a lot of things we couldn't grant them, you know, one of those things we couldn't—it was an impossible situation. So actually, when Pearl Harbor was struck it was not a big surprise. Because at that time it was just some thing—It was more at that time more in favor of everything that was going on than there is—There wasn't as much controversy as there is now days about Bosnia and whether we should or we shouldn't. In those days it was “That was it and you had to contend with it.”

**SUE:** As far as the Germans, do you remember like newspaper accounts or radio accounts of their aggression.

**LEONARD:** Oh, yeah, yeah. When they went into Austria and all that stuff. They were, at the time we got into the war, they had already captured most of the continent. As far as I can remember, and I used to—well, this was quite a few years before the war started, maybe '36 or '37. I was still in high school and I would get up in the morning about seven o'clock and Adolph Hitler would be giving a big speech on the radio at that time. That's one thing I remember and there would be—Crowds would be yelling in favor of him, you know, and Adolph Hitler would be giving a speech.

We had a hired man and I'd kid around about things sometimes. I always kidded the hired man. I said, “Well, you're going to have to get over there and fight.” He didn't like it. I shouldn't kid about that. I was about fifteen or sixteen years old at that particular time. “You're going to have to go over there and fight.” No, he

didn't like it.

**SUE:** So Hitler's speeches were also broadcast on the radio.

**LEONARD:** Oh, yes, here in the United States. Hitler's speeches, yes, they were broadcast. I remember just before I went to school, around seven o'clock, I had to catch this bus to go to school. I got up and was having my breakfast. Mother was getting breakfast and so forth. You know like they are about six hours ahead, of course. So at seven o'clock, that would be about one o'clock in the afternoon, he'd be giving a big speech on the radio.

**SUE:** All in German?

**LEONARD:** Yes, but they were translating it too, what it was, but I can remember those big speeches.

**SUE:** Tell us. As far as how you got in the military, did you say you enlisted?

**LEONARD:** Yes, I enlisted, yes. But I was just, let's say you'd call it a forced enlistment, because I knew I was going to be drafted. That was coming. I was classified A-1 and that was to be drafted. If you enlisted, you had more choice. So I just jumped the gun about six weeks and enlisted in what was known then as the Air Corps—Army Air Corps. At that time it was a part of the army. The Army Air Corps, so I enlisted in that part. I enlisted for a mechanic; actually that's what I enlisted for.

**SUE:** Is that what you ended up?

**LEONARD:** No, I didn't come anywhere near that. Do you want me to advance a little further into it or do you want to—on one of the other questions?

**SUE:** Maybe just how you were inducted and where and so on and then we can get back into that. Now you were inducted where?

**LEONARD:** I went to Des Moines, Iowa. They put us on a train. From there we went to the basic training camp out in Camp Luna, New

Mexico, which was situated up in the mountains 7,000 feet above sea level and me never being above 1000 feet—it was kind of hard on my system to take that extra elevation.

**SUE:** And how old were you at the time?

**LEONARD:** Well, I was twenty-one.

**SUE:** Twenty-one. So then what did they train you to do in your camp?

**LEONARD:** Well, that is something that is kind of a joke with me because I didn't get any training at. I enlisted as a mechanic. But first we had to go to this basic training camp. We weren't in this basic training camp very long. Like I said I think it was the 9th or 10th of October that I enlisted and I was in there about a month and we marched around a little bit and shot the rifle a couple of times. In fact, on the farm I was accustomed to a rifle and one thing and another so the amount of training I got was just—I would classify it as absolutely nothing. And so then, I think what—I just thought about this in the last day or two. I got into the situation that I got into because you see I had two years of college and I could type, I had taken a commercial course in high school and I think that looked at that and they said, "We need guys up...along the Atlantic Air Bases. We need people that can work in offices—who can type and so forth." And I think they looked at that and they said, "We don't have to train this fellow, we'll just send him"—And that was true of 250 other fellows—well they were probably—they took all sorts of people like truck drivers—that could drive fuel trucks, you know. They didn't have to train them for the bases up there in the North Atlantic. They took truck drivers and somebody that was already a mechanic, they were not going to train them. They didn't have time to train them probably, so they just picked all of us up—250 of us, put us on a troop train. We were on there—well, the total time we were on the troop train was about four days because we were going from Camp Luna, New Mexico to the very tip of Maine. Outside of being transferred from California it was about the longest train trip you could take in the United States. And so we were on that train for about two days and we didn't

know where we were headed. We knew we were going through Kansas and Illinois and so forth and about the third day the rumor came out, "We're going to Presque Isle, Maine." Do you know where Presque Isle, Maine is?

**SUE:** Mm. Hm.

**LEONARD:** You do?

**SUE:** My sister lives in Maine. Bangor.

**LEONARD:** Bangor. Yeah. And I thought I knew my geography fairly well.

**SUE:** That's a pretty obscure place.

**LEONARD:** Presque Isle, Maine. Where is that at? I'm dumb. I should know my geography but I don't know it that good. Finally we did end up in Presque Isle, Maine—which is up north of Bangor, Maine. Just about as far up in the tip of Maine as you can get. Bangor has a little inlet. Ships can come up to Bangor. Presque Isle is something like 40 miles north of Bangor and it's inland. It's an inland community and there was an air base there and then there were barracks there and they dumped us in these barracks. Do you want me to continue on or do you have some more questions?

**SUE:** Yeah. Lets go in chronological order so you can just continue on—with, you know—how long you were there and then we can move onto where you went from there.

**LEONARD:** Well, we arrived at that air base, Presque Isle Army Air Base it was called. In those days it was called Army—Army Air Base—Presque Isle Army Air Base it was called—See? And we arrived there the first part of November. I just told you I enlisted in the second week of October so you see I didn't have much training. So then we were in the barracks there and we just hung around there for, oh, about three weeks in my case. Then there was a shipping list of 25 fellows called out and I happened to be on that shipping list. In those days, in the service, things went mostly by rumor but you would be surprised how correct the rumors were. The rumor was that this shipping list was

going to Goose Bay, Labrador. And it was. That's where we went. We flew on up to Goose Bay, Labrador, and then the others,—let's say roughly 225 guys—were still down in Presque Isle, Maine, and there—just branching off into what happened to them is that they stayed there until about February.

And really the idea was that all of these 250 guys were to go mainly to Greenland. There was a base in Greenland, where we were supposed to go. But they pulled us 25 off for a special reason to go to Goose Bay so we went—but the rest—the 225 were headed for the base in Greenland which was called BWI and it's near Narsarsuaq, Greenland, if you know where that's at. Anyway they were going to fly in up there but the flying conditions during the winter and the airplanes available got to be such that they realized, "Well, we can't fly."

So they shipped them down to Boston around in February and put them on a boat. Now this boat went out of Boston in a convoy. The convoy was headed for England. So when they got up just off of Newfoundland the convoy headed east toward England. And this single lone boat with these 225 guys on it headed for Greenland. Well—evidently there was a U-boat watching the situation. They couldn't attack the convoy very well but they saw this boat take off and they thought we'll get that guy, and they did. They sunk the boat. The trouble with this time of year up there it was so cold that all the ropes and so forth to get the life boats off were frozen so tight that they couldn't get them loose and so most of everybody went down with the ship. But there were 25 fellows from the unit—I don't call it a unit—we were just a group of people—soldiers—and they were lucky enough to get off and get in life boats. I don't know just how they were picked up. It was so cold and icy and so forth and I don't know exactly how they were picked up. They had frozen off—

Then come the next June we at Goose Bay—some people working out where the airplanes were coming in from Greenland, saw and met these fellows that we were with down there and some had arms missing and legs missing—frozen off—and they told them what happened.

And so really I'm only one of about 50, or at least 25 that didn't get scratched. The rest of them that was in this—that got arms and legs frozen off and that wasn't too good either.

**SUE:** Why do you think that you were chosen in that 25?

**LEONARD:** I think it was because, like I mentioned before, that I had two years of college and I could type and so forth and they were looking for people that could man the offices in these areas.

**SUE:** They split you up from where you were in New Mexico, right?

**LEONARD:** Yeah, that's right.

**SUE:** And then they kind of—you all were together.

**LEONARD:** Most people in the service were in something like 61st Division, 21st Regiment, such and such a Battalion. But that was not true in our case. We—the 250 people that left New Mexico were just a miscellaneous group of people that didn't have any name or number to it whatsoever. We were just—we were in the Air Corps and that was about the only thing you could say about it, so they just split this group up as they felt like it.

**SUE:** Hm. Once you did get up to Goose Bay, what were your duties there? What kind of things did you do? Did you do typing, and—

**LEONARD:** Immediately, I was assigned to the headquarters office, some of it was typing, but my main duty fell into the filing classification. We had the commanding officer's office and the sergeant major's office which was the enlisted men's portion of the commanding office there. See? And so there was quite a bit of filing to do and eventually I was to take care of all of the filing for the whole main command of the base, I was in charge of all of the files. I learned later that back in my home town that the banker and so forth got inquiries about me because I was cleared for secret information. Many of these files were marked "Secret" and "Top Secret"

and so forth. Many of these things were marked that way. Before I got into that, they'd evidently inquired back in my home town—"Well, what kind of a fellow is this?" See? So then I was put into that, so then I would have to file all of these papers.

Then when the Colonel—Colonel Hassell—well before Colonel Hassell became Commander, there was a couple of other commanders but anyway when the commanding officer of the base would come in and want to know, "I want to see such a radio gram," or so forth. I would have to know—I would have to read the stuff so I knew where to file it and I had to know—have a knowledge of what he was talking about so I could go—these matters—they wanted it right now. So you had to know just where you put it.

**SUE:** So, all the military correspondence that would come through would go past your desk then.

**LEONARD:** Yeah. Yeah. Well, a lot of the top secret stuff probably went to the commanding officer first and then came to my desk. I wasn't the first one to see it.

Now in addition to our base at Goose Bay, we had command over about three or four bases further north, like in Baffin Island and those areas. It was called "Crystal Command" or something like that. We were also handling information about the other bases that were further up north than we were.

**SUE:** And when you were stationed there, did you ever have a chance—did you get "off time" when you got to go off the base? And maybe meet some of the people who lived up there or something?

**LEONARD:** Oh Yeah! There were sort of Indians to a certain extent. And then there was this town that's just north of Goose Bay. I don't know if you know when I talk about Goose Bay if you know what I'm talking about.

**SUE:** I know vaguely where Labrador is.

**LEONARD:** Yeah. You ask—the people—you see Labrador is pretty sparsely populated and so

around the base there within twenty miles there really wasn't a single—well, yes, there was a little Indian village down there, we had to have passes to go down there and I had no interest to go down there but we did take one excursion by boat. I think I showed you the picture where we were on that excursion. We went up the Northwest River and the Northwest River is the most civilized part outside of Indians. It was regular—I don't know whether the people were Scottish or something. They were not Indian people. They were sort of missionary people that—and this was a village of about maybe 200 people. And now—we drove up there in 1986 and it's probably a village of maybe 1000 right now. And they've got a paved road and a bridge up there and everything now, but at that time it was only accessible by boat.

**SUE:** Is the climate there pretty harsh?

**LEONARD:** I wouldn't say it was real harsh, no. The winters, you know get very cold—well, 40 below zero. But it was a very dry cold and the snow in the winter time kind of keeps falling. It never melts, so at that time they just let it pile up on the roads and they just kept driving over it, and the packed down snow would get four feet deep on the road. I remember one time, I was very lucky all the along. I was up there about a year and then they said after a year you could go home on furlough so I went home in September and do you know that we went to a church picnic in Iowa in September and I almost froze to death and here I came from Labrador. It was the dampness. Up there you didn't have the dampness and that made a great difference. There wasn't as much wind. If we had 40 below out [?] it was more still and I didn't really suffer from the cold at all.

**SUE:** How long were you in Labrador?

**LEONARD:** I was in Labrador from December of '42 to—I guess it was about December—no—January of '44. A year and a half. We were supposed to be there two years, but it doesn't figure out just right—but I went there in '42 and came out of there—oh, it was the latter part of '44. It was almost two years. But I was so dog-gone lucky that I seemed to get into lucky situa-

tions where other people—like, for instance, in September of '43 that was, I got a furlough. Then turned around in December of '43 they chose two of us fellows to go to administrative school and to the envy of everybody—while we were supposed to go to Colorado, I guess, Fort Collins, Colorado. So we got in the airplane and got down to Presque Isle, Maine, and were on our way to Colorado to this administrative school—and—

**SUE:** Would that have been strictly for the military then? Administration for the military?

**LEONARD:** Yeah, administration for the military. And when we got down there, I was so doggone lucky, you know that they said, “well, they’re closing the school in Colorado, but they are moving it to Florida and it will not open until January 15th, and we don’t know with you, so we’ll just give you a leave of absence and you can go home for two weeks.”

**SUE:** And this was when the war was still going on?

**LEONARD:** Yeah. It just shows how extremely lucky I was! And I’d just had a furlough in September and now here comes Christmas. I was home for Christmas, and then I was in warmer climate and then we headed down to Florida and it was extremely warmer and these poor guys up there! We didn’t—we finally got back up there about April. I don’t know—we just couldn’t hardly face the guys that were up there.

**SUE:** Did you spend a Thanksgiving and Christmas up there—another year? Do you remember what you did?

**LEONARD:** Yeah, the first Thanksgiving we were still in Presque Isle, Maine, and the second Thanksgiving I was in Labrador.

**SUE:** What was it like there? Did they try to make it like the traditional American—?

**LEONARD:** Yeah! I mean,—you see we had good living conditions. We weren’t like over in France or somewhere like that where they were living in bunkers and foxholes and so on. We

had sort of luxurious living. I want to state what our mission was, a little bit, up there. You think we were up there and we weren’t doing anything, but our mission was this. If you look on a map—In fact this Colonel Hassell, he was one of the first ones to try to fly this route in 1928 and if you were ever on an airplane going to England or any of those areas, they fly over those areas. So that is really the route to England. If you look on a map England and those areas that are that far north, except they are warmer because of the ocean currents there. And so all the bombers that went over to bomb Germany—there were two bases. There was one named Gander Bay in Newfoundland and ours, about two hundred miles further north, was called Goose Bay. Now those two bases carried most all of the bombers. The bombers would land there as their last fueling stop to go into formation and bomb Europe. We had many days a hundred bombers come in and go out and I was working in the office, so I didn’t [do it] directly but the line crews had to fuel up these airplanes and all that stuff. We had to have quarters for these crews to stay over night when they would come in one day and if the weather was bad the next night they’d go fly and they flew by celestial navigation. They would take off about seven o’clock in the evening and fly all night and get to England the next morning. And that’s about true. We’ve made a couple, three trips over to Europe and England since the 1970’s and that’s true of the commercial airlines, although they take off out of Chicago now. They all take off about four o’clock in the afternoon and arrive in England about seven o’clock in the morning. That’s true.

**SUE:** When you were telling me before and you showed me that picture of the funeral where you were a pallbearer. Was that because one of the flyers crashed on take off, leaving the base?

**LEONARD:** Yes, that’s right. One of the bombers crashed on take-off.

**SUE:** Did that happen very often?

**LEONARD:** It happened at least twice and maybe three times. I don’t quite remember. I know at least a couple of times it happened.

**SUE:** They were on their way to England?

**LEONARD:** They were heavily loaded with fuel and they had to gun their engines as hard as they could to get them off. Those old engines would heat up too much and catch on fire and then down the plane would go. You see they were heavily loaded with fuel to go to England and in order to do that, they really had to gun their engines and they kind of overdid it sometimes.

**SUE:** And they had bombs on board, too?

**LEONARD:** No, they didn't carry any bombs at all.

**SUE:** Oh, they didn't?

**LEONARD:** No, not then. Because they had to have all the flight gear for the personnel that were on the bomber and plus they had to carry a lot of gas.

**SUE:** And so they got the bombs in England.

**LEONARD:** Oh, yeah. They were shipped over by boat.

**SUE:** Let's see—if you could name the most difficult thing that you did in the service, what would it be?

**LEONARD:** Boy, that's a...What sort of thing are you thinking about? I can't think. Like I say I keep repeating all of the time. I was the luckiest man in the world and I just can't think of anything that was difficult—really.

**SUE:** You had typed in this letter that you were in New York for sometime.

**LEONARD:** Yeah, yeah. That was after I had finished the two year tour up in Labrador.

**SUE:** OK, that was after—

**LEONARD:** Yes, that was toward the end of the war.

**SUE:** OK, you went to the school then in Florida?

**LEONARD:** Yeah, yeah.

**SUE:** And then you went up to New York?

**LEONARD:** No, no. I went back to Labrador after that, see?

**SUE:** OK. Do you remember how you felt about VE-Day when you heard about it?

**LEONARD:** Well, I was in New York at that time and, well, we were quite elated. Of course, I went down to Times Square in New York for the big celebration. I was lucky. I was there. While they were fighting over there in the trenches and foxholes, I was going to free radio shows and so forth in New York.

**SUE:** What was your role in the military when you were in New York? Did I ask you that?

**LEONARD:** In New York, it was getting toward the end of the war, and our role there was to—there were orders. Personnel would have orders for where they were going overseas, and there they were also coming back from overseas, the ones that had their tour and they were being assigned from there to different places in the United States and it was part of my—they had a big line that went around the table, a big counter that went around and these people would come in there. We were processing only people that came back by airplane or went over by airplane. They went out of LaGuardia Field and we were only processing those who went by airplane. And so they would come off the airplanes there and then they'd go by this counter and we would have the orders ready for them and give them there orders—whatever sort of papers they needed to get their meals and so forth, or to go where they were going to go in the States.

**SUE:** So some of these soldiers that had been in the European Theater—

**LEONARD:** Oh, yeah. Most of them were bomber crews that were coming back, had served their tour of duty, and then after once they—see, I was there in August when VE-Day was very shortly after that. Then there was a high influx of these cruisers, as many as the air-



planes they could muster up—to get them to carry men—they were carrying, oh, maybe three or four hundred people a day coming in off these airplanes. We were processing them, sending them back to wherever they were going to go.

**SUE:** Did you ever talk to any of them? Did anything stand out in your mind about any of the guys who came through.

**LEONARD:** One of the things that stands out in my mind is that—you see, in those days, they had the USO groups, see? At that time Frank Sinatra was very popular. And he came through our line.

**SUE:** He did? You got to do his paper work?

**LEONARD:** Yeah.

**SUE:** Did you say anything to him? Did you ask for his autograph?

**LEONARD:** No, I didn't ask him. I wouldn't do that. It was all business as far as I was concerned. We just treated him, we didn't stand there and Ah. Ah and Oh Oh. He didn't say much. He wasn't obstinate or anything like that. He just didn't say much. We just processed his papers and he took them away. And there was a whole bunch of other people, including a band or something or other. Yeah, see it was back in the Frank Sinatra days when the bobby soxers were going crazy in New York where he was singing there and here he comes bouncing right through our lines cause he'd been going overseas on a tour.

**SUE:** What was your opinion of the use of the Atomic Bomb in Japan, at the time when it was dropped?

**LEONARD:** Mm. I don't know. There's many opinions. The general thought was, "Well, this has to be done," you know. And that was it. We agreed with it.

I just want to divert back to Goose Bay—a couple of little instances that were peculiar. We were talking about planes that came up there and crashed or something like that. A B-24 flying

over one night—he was circling to land at our base, see. It was a tanker airplane with gasoline on board—it was gasoline. He didn't have too much on board but it exploded at about 4000 feet—up there about 20 miles north west of the base. And the radio operator was blown out of that airplane and fell free into a snowdrift and the next day we found wandering, we were up there looking around. We found him wandering around in the woods the next day.

**SUE:** Was he alive?

**LEONARD:** He was alive, walking around, because he fell without a parachute into the snow bank. I've even heard of people falling out of planes into the Pacific and happened to hit the ocean just right and surviving. Another day we were in the office. Of course, we had a few defense planes around there, fighting planes around there that would come in buzzing—VAROOM—over the airport every once in a while and so we got familiar with the sound—VAROOM—and we knew what it was when they came over, see. So one day we were in the office and it went VAROOM—Oh, oh. That guy didn't pull out. So we went out quick and looked and a big plume of smoke was over there. And what it happened to be was an English Mosquito plane. I don't know if you know what that is but anyway it was built out of wood and it was up 20,000 feet and there was something wrong with the plane and they were checking it out. They were going to fly it across the ocean. I didn't know how he got up there, 20,000 feet. So we went out and looked and we saw this big plume of smoke going up over there. And well, he had crashed and we were kind of milling around. Then there was pieces of the plane and clouds maybe 7 or 8 or 10,000 feet up. Some of them are made out of wood. These pieces of wood kept falling out of the clouds and all of a sudden we looked up and we saw a parachute coming down.

We didn't think too much about it except that's good. So it was only a couple or three blocks from where we were at to where he was going to land—the parachute. So we thought we'd run down there. We ran down there and we got as close as we could. The rescue officer was down

there, see? And as we were looking up there, maybe a thousand feet up, we thought, why is he kicking his legs around so much. Why is he throwing his arms around so much? And so he was coming down. He was headed right straight for a concrete ramp. Our rescue officer was out there with a rescue truck and so forth. He was coming right straight at this concrete ramp. And so it turned out that the reason he was dangling his legs so much was that he got blown out of the plane and fell several thousand feet when the parachute opened and just about tore him out of the parachute so— one leg was still caught in the parachute and his head was first down. You can imagine—he was head first down toward the concrete ramp. So he was trying to right himself, trying to pull himself up and get hold of something so maybe he wouldn't [break out further] or hit the ramp and so forth. So the rescue officer saw that and I don't know why they didn't get a rescue net—maybe they didn't have a rescue net in time to get out there, see? So the rescue officer took aim with his body, ran for the fellow and caught the guy and deflected him enough so that he didn't hit the concrete. We saw that.

**SUE:** Wow!

**LEONARD:** That was some kind of a miracle.

**SUE:** I'm going to ask you this just in case. Did you ever go to a VA hospital?

**LEONARD:** No. Well, my uncle was in about 20 years ago.

**SUE:** That's probably about it unless you can think of something else you'd like to add. Would you rather stop for a moment?

**LEONARD:** Let's stop for a minute...I mention the fact here in this write up that they tried to ferry fighter planes over to Europe. That was just a little bit before I got up there in 1942 but it never was a success with fighter airplanes. These other bases like at Greenland and up at Forbisher Bay—they were for the fighter planes—to take shorter hops at a time. And one of the most—I don't know if people know about it—There was, I think, one B-17 and five or six

fighter planes behind it, following it, and they took off from a base a little further north in Greenland, and were heading for Iceland and as they got toward Iceland, they found out they were fogged in and they couldn't land in Iceland so they had to turn around in Greenland and they didn't have enough fuel to get back to their base in Greenland, so they landed on the Ice Cap on Greenland and every one of the Fighter planes, the B-17—they landed safely up there—on the Ice Cap. The Ice Cap in supposed to be a dangerous place, but they landed safely there. None of them got injured. And then this B. R. J. Hassell from Rockford here—he happened to be commanding officer in Greenland at that time. He flew a search plane up there and found them on the Ice Cap. I don't know if I mentioned it before, but Colonel Hassell—he flew up there in 1928. He was flying to Sweden. There were a lot of Swedish people in Rockford and they were interested in Sweden, so—so he made up a plane that he was flying over to Sweden. He got lost, well—sort of lost—as he approached Greenland and he couldn't find his little old base in Greenland in 1928 and so he landed his plane on the Ice Cap and walked off safely. And so now here in 1942 he was flying another airplane—searching for these people and he found these six airplanes and the B-17 up there on the Ice Cap and then he supervised how to get up on the Ice Cap and get them off and get them down and they all got safely down. And now, today, there's a big push on right out here at Rockford Airport—they are rebuilding World War II airplanes. They are, as I understand it, they are trying to dig these six fighter planes and this B-17 covered with ice somewhat up there. They found some of them and they are digging them out and bringing them back and restoring them.

Then I might just mention that when I got out of the service I was entitled to go to college. Everybody was entitled to a certain amount of college and I was entitled to four years of school. Well, so I started to go to school and took up engineering and I went to Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa, and then I went to Iowa State in Ames, Iowa. And then I got a Mechanical Engineering degree and that's what I was. I was a Design Engineer. That was my life time work after that. In fact, the schooling—I was in three

years. I was entitled to four years of schooling.

**SUE:** Was that completely paid for?

**LEONARD:** Almost. The government, really. The GI Bill of Rights. You probably have heard of the GI Bill of Rights.

**SUE:** My dad went under the GI Bill, too.

**LEONARD:** Anyway, I was entitled to four years of school. Here I was lucky again. I go to four years of school and I took an extra course in between and I graduated from Loras College. So I took some side courses so it took me longer to get through this engineering because I went to Loras College and then I thought I might flunk out of the Engineering School so I took some education courses and Science courses and the—so when it came to the last quarter to sign up. Actually I had a week or two or a month or two before the four years was up, see?

**SUE:** Did you have to do it in a four-year period of time?

**LEONARD:** Yeah. But with me, I got about four years and two months. That's part of my luck again. I appreciate the fact that I had luck beyond luck. Right to the very end. I got two or three months of schooling beyond the four years. My life time work after that was as a Design Engineer, which I retired from in 1986. After that, well, I'd always been interested in airplanes so I learned to fly on my own, the latter part of—just give you a little bit of the coincidences that you can't believe in hardly. When I was over in New York, why there was a guy bunking above me. He was just working. I don't know what he was doing. He wasn't flying or anything but he was a flight instructor, see. It happened to be this fellow from—well, he wasn't from Dubuque, Iowa, but he was doing flight instruction before the war—I'd say in 1940, '41, '42—in that era—doing flight instructing in Dubuque, Iowa. And it happened to be that he was the flight instructor for a classmate of mine back in Iowa. And so I took my first flying lesson from him, and that's another sort of a coincidence thing that this guy just sleeping in the bunk above me was a flight instructor for this fel-

low—my classmate—he went on to be a fighter pilot in Europe during the war. But it was interesting that he was a flight instructor for a classmate of mine over in Iowa. And then I took my first flying lessons from him and I've been flying ever since. I've been flying now—I had my license—I think an unofficial title that I had. I've been active pilot for more years than anybody in Rockford. It's been almost fifty years now. And I'm still active. I'm going out this evening.

**SUE:** That's fine.

**LEONARD:** I'm seventy-three years old in June and still flying.

**SUE:** That's great!

**LEONARD:** That's my life.

**SUE:** Thank you very much.