

Interview with Cordell Addison

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Interviewer: Steve Leonard

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Leonard: Hello, today is November 8, 2009. My name is Steve Leonard. I'm a volunteer for the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Oral History Project "Veterans Remember". I'm with Cordell Addison of Elkhart, Illinois, and he's going to talk to us about his World War II experience. I'd like to say hello, Cordell.

Addison: Hello.

Leonard: It's good to have you with us.

Addison: It's good to be here.

Leonard: Good. Well, let's begin with when and where you were born.

Addison: I was born near Elkhart, Illinois in Jackson County, about two miles southeast of Elkhart.

Leonard: I see. And I believe you had a pretty large family. Could you tell us your mom and dad's name and the rest of your family?

Addison: My father was Henry Clay Addison, and he was born in Kentucky. My mother was Cora Alice Williams, and she was born Bowie, Texas. They were married in 1899, I think, near Nevada, Missouri and had thirteen children, seven boys and six girls.

Leonard: And you were the...?

Addison: Twelfth.

Leonard: Twelfth of thirteen.

Addison: Yes.

Leonard: Okay. (laughs) You had a great big family. I'm sure you had some great experiences growing up.

Addison: Yes. In addition to that, my grandpa stayed with us part of the time, till he passed away.

Leonard: I see. So at this time—this was during the Depression, is that correct?

Addison: Well, I was born in 1920, and the Depression hit before '30, '29.

Leonard: Right, right. So you grew up in what we call the Shawnee Hills?

Addison: Yes, they're sometimes called it the Shawnee Hills or Little Egypt.

Leonard: Little Egypt, yeah.

Addison: Southern part of Illinois.

Leonard: Right. Well, can you tell us a few things about what it was like growing up during that time, your responsibilities and chores that you might have had?

Addison: Well, as soon as I was big enough, I was given the job of feeding chickens and carrying stove wood and helping my mother in the garden. She always had a big garden—had a big family, and it took a lot of stuff to feed them. And my father only went up to fourth grade, I think, in school, and it wasn't easy for them, I know, but they did a pretty good job raising thirteen children.

Leonard: Yes, they did. I've met a number of them, and they're all successful people. I'm sure they did a fine job, and you probably were a very close-knit family.

Addison: Yes.

Leonard: Everybody had a chore to do, didn't they?

Addison: Yes, yes. As they grew up, they graduated or was put into different chores and stuff, and the smaller ones followed right along.

Leonard: So did your dad raise livestock beyond chickens?

Addison: Yes, they had hogs and cattle. They usually milked six or eight cows at least, sometimes more.

Leonard: Didn't you tell me that one of your responsibilities was to collect the cream or milk and take it to the county store to exchange for food? Or tell me about that.

Addison: Well, when I got big enough to help milk—all by hand, of course— we milked the cows and separated the milk, and the cream was sold.

Leonard: Okay, you sold it to the country store?

Addison: Cobden, usually. Took the cream and eggs and bought the groceries and stuff with them.

Leonard: Yeah, that's what I thought. I remember you telling me.

Addison: Originally, before we moved to Union County, my mother made butter about twice a week, and she had customers that she would deliver that to, and if she had any left, she took it to the store. They would take it and give her a due bill, or she'd buy groceries on that. That was before the Depression got bad.

Leonard: I see, I see. So your family was pretty well self-sufficient, wasn't it, on the farm?

Addison: Yes, yes, pretty well. If we didn't raise it, we didn't have it, usually. We bought flour, usually, and meal, sugar and coffee and things like that, but the main part of our diet, we raised a lot of it.

Leonard: Now, you said your mother would bake bread twice a week?

Addison: Well, usually, I think. She'd bake light bread like we'd take in our school lunches and stuff. Of course, for usual meals and all, we usually had biscuits for breakfast and cornbread or biscuits for the evening meal, too.

Leonard: Yeah. So she was a pretty busy lady, and I'm sure the older girls helped too, didn't they, when they came along.

Addison: Yes, until they got old enough to get jobs away from home, they helped. They even helped in the fields. I can remember them helping shock wheat and things like that. There was four girls before there was any boys born.

Leonard: Oh, I see, okay.

Addison: The older ones, they got to help on the farming quite a bit.

Leonard: So it makes me think that all of you children had a very good work ethic. It seems like you had to have a work ethic. (laughs)

Addison: Yeah, we had to, because if we didn't, why, we was punished. (laughs)

Leonard: Yeah, right, right. And the family depended on it, too, so I'm sure that prepared the kids for later on in life, that they knew nothing (laughs) is handed to you; you have to work for it.

Addison: That's right. It wasn't easy all the time, but we didn't really know how poor we were. Very little money we ever had.

Leonard: But everybody else was in pretty much the same—

Addison: Yeah, pretty well, yes. Most people didn't have quite that many children, but we didn't know how poor we were—didn't realize it.

Leonard: Uh-uh, no. You didn't expect a lot. I know that a very important chapter of your life was when you joined the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps]. Could you tell me when you joined and how old you were at that time?

Addison: Yes. I had tried to get work. The only work I could get was local farmers in our area, and I worked putting up hay—that was loose hay, not baled hay. My brother and I kept track one summer, and I think we helped put up over a hundred loads of hay.

Leonard: Now, could you tell me how big a load would be?

Addison: Well, it would probably be over a ton, maybe.

Leonard: Wow. And that was all by hand, I'm sure.

Addison: Yeah.

Leonard: Pitchfork, yeah?

Addison: Pitchfork, yeah, and pull it up in the barn with our horse, it was a rope with a pulley. But I worked too some in people's [fields]—grew peaches and asparagus and stuff. Cut asparagus for ten cents an hour and picked peaches. I think you got a little more for picking peaches, about a dollar and a quarter to start with. Worked for fifty cents a day and my dinner for neighbors, putting up hay and general work like that.

Leonard: So when did the opportunity come to join the Civilian Conservation Corps?

Addison: That started I think in '32, and we had one camp. We lived about three miles across country from where it was, Giant City State Park.

Leonard: Had you joined the CCC?

Addison: Yes. I couldn't get a job, so a lot of the young fellows were joining the CCC camp, which paid thirty dollars a month, but you only got five dollars; twenty-five was sent home to your folks.

Leonard: Oh, it was sent home.

Addison: Yeah.

Leonard: I didn't realize that. (laughs)

So you were really helping your family out, and you were getting a good job along with it; it sounds like good training and—

Addison: Experience, yes.

Leonard: Yeah, yeah. You were twenty at the time?

Addison: Yes, I was twenty.

Leonard: And this was in what year?

Addison: Nineteen forty. I remember I went and talked to my dad. I said, "I want to join the CCC camps," and he said, "Well, you just go ahead and sow your wild oats."
(laughter)

Leonard: That was his take on it, huh?

Addison: Yeah, (laughter) he didn't have too good an opinion, I guess, didn't realize what it was. I signed up for it and was accepted, and from Anna, they sent me to Charleston, Illinois, to the CCC camp. I spent about a month there and went home for Veterans Day—had about three days off, I think. When I came back, they had a list on the bulletin board—I don't remember how many—ten or twelve, maybe more—was to be transferred to Palos Park near Willow Springs, Illinois.

Leonard: Is that in northern Illinois?

Addison: Yeah, it's up near Chicago, Willow Springs. I worked there as a stonemason, learning how to make walls and stuff for parkways..

Leonard: I was wondering what you did. So was this?

Addison: Digging ditches for telephone lines and things like that. Well, I'm getting ahead of myself, I guess. At Charleston, they put in a fish hatchery. They were building a dam when I left there.

Leonard: So did you work at Charleston first, and then they sent you to Palos Park?

Addison: Yeah, yeah.

Leonard: So at Charleston, tell me what you did there. What was your job?

Addison: We went out working at Fox Ridge State Park, usually, and we made some parking areas and things like this fish hatchery.

Leonard: So you worked developing [the park]?

Addison: Yeah. But I got transferred out there before we finished that job, to Palos Park.

Leonard: Did you build the pond or the hatchery?

Addison: We were working on the dam. And then they built a hatchery there later. I was back thereafter I was married; I went through there, and they had a fish hatchery there.

Leonard: Okay, so then you went to Palos Park, and you did basically masonry work and built fences or stone retaining walls? Just a number of different jobs?

Addison: Dug trenches for telephone lines.

Leonard: Well, how many were in your company?

Addison: I don't remember for sure. It seemed like there was close to two hundred, but I'm not sure.

Leonard: Two hundred young men from throughout the state?

Addison: Yeah, yeah.

Leonard: Did you live in barracks?

Addison: Yes, we lived in barracks. And we also had to stand duty for firewatch. We had fires. There was always a list. You had to check the bulletin board. If you were on that list, in case of fire, you had to be there, and you couldn't get a leave or anything. So then later, they wanted me to take a job on night watch, going through the barracks, all the buildings, and checking through the night about every hour or so, and keeping the fires going in the barracks wherever they had stoves.

Leonard: So you did that, too?

Addison: Yeah. I was working third shift, you might say, a night shift.

Leonard: But your experience was very positive, wasn't it? You felt like you gained a lot of experience?

Addison: Well, yes. It helped, definitely. A lot of those men went on into the Army after that. People were getting drafted that was over twenty-one and , went into the Army. But I was reading somewhere not long ago where it said they made excellent soldiers because they already was disciplined and knew how to live together..

Leonard: It was really good training, then, in that respect.

Addison: Yes, yes.

Leonard: Because it was rather set up as a military?

Addison: Yeah. Army ran it, really. They had Army officers.

Leonard: Oh, you did? Army officers. I didn't realize that.

Addison: Yeah. Somebody said Hitler said that was Roosevelt's hidden army.

Leonard: Oh, really? (laughs) I can see why, I guess.

Addison: Of course, we didn't do any drilling or anything. We stood retreat and had a uniform.

Leonard: You did have a uniform?

Addison: Yeah. It's an old Army uniform. I think, leftover from World War I. And they issued us the fatigues, blue denims and stuff for work.

Leonard: And you had roll call and I guess mess call? (laughs) Is that right or not?

Addison: Yes, they'd have—what'd they call it?—veille in the morning and retreat at the evening, and you take the flag down and so forth.

Leonard: Oh, I see. And when did you have to be in your cot? (laughs) By what time?

Addison: Usually nine o'clock was lights out. There was a little bit of hanky-panky went on, and guys short-sheeting each other and one thing or another.

Leonard: (laughs) Oh, yeah. That's just part of it, I guess. Did you make good friends there?

Addison: Yeah, yeah. I only stayed in six months. When my six months was up, I was going through the buildings checking fires and so forth, and the fellow who was a veteran of World War I was our boss out in the field, but he asked me what I was going to do. It was about time for me to reenlist. He said, "Are you going to reenlist?" I said, "No, I don't think I will." "Why?" he said. "What are you going to do?" I said, "Well, I'm going back home, I guess, and try to get a job. If I can't get a job, I'll just help my dad." And he said, "Well, if you don't get a job, you come back up here. I got a brother that's a contractor in Chicago, and I'll give you a job with him." He told me some of the projects he worked on there, bridges and buildings and so forth. But I didn't go back up there.

Leonard: You must have been a good worker, impressed him.

Addison: Well, I guess. Some of the guys asked how come I didn't have to work KP weekends. They had a checklist on the bulletin board, and they graded you according to your work. Some of the guys asked me, "How come you never get

on KP?" Well, I don't know, but the guys that goofed off and didn't work were the ones that usually got that.

Leonard: They noticed that, as well as they noticed the ones who didn't goof off and had a good work ethic, I'm sure. Okay, so this brings us to when you were six months in the Civilian Conservation Corps, and after your six months, you went home?

Addison: Went home. Got discharged.

Leonard: Got discharged. And what year was that, what month?

Addison: That would have been the last of March in '41.

Leonard: So can you tell me what you did up until the time that you entered the Army?

Addison: Well, I helped my dad on the farm some. It wasn't very long—I can't remember just how long. But I had a sister and a brother-in-law that were cooking for an extra gang on the IC [Illinois Central] Railroad. And they came out one evening and said, 'Do you want to go to work on the railroad? You got a job if you want to go to work on the railroad.' And I said, "Yeah." So I went to work on an extra gang, laying switches at the time in Anna.

Leonard: Explain to me what the extra gang means.

Addison: Well, they did a lot of maintenance work like laying rail, but they did a lot of pulling ties and replacing them and servicing, raising the track and putting the rock under it.

Leonard: How many were in that extra gang?

Addison: I think there was about thirty, or a little over thirty, maybe. We had two extra gangs down in that area.

Leonard: Okay. But your responsibility was taking care of that track and keeping it in functioning good order?

Addison: We had a foreman, and he always had plenty for us to do.

Leonard: And you were telling me that it was a very, very, very difficult job, really. It was pretty strenuous. You were taking rails, iron rails or steel rails off.

Addison: Well, we laid switches first in the towns.

Leonard: Tell us what the switch is again. What is a switch?

Addison: Well, it's where they direct the train from one place to another. They have to throw the switch that guides the train into the other track.

Leonard: So you were installing those.

Addison: Yeah, we replaced some switches like that. Then we laid new steel; it would have been about probably twelve, fifteen miles of new steel by that area. We took up 110-pound steel—that's 110 pounds to the yard—and put down 112-pound new steel there.

Leonard: So it weighed 112 pounds per yard, is that it?

Addison: Yeah. Rails were thirty-three feet long.

Leonard: Thirty-three. Okay, I didn't know that.

Addison: And of course they were expecting war likely to come on, and I guess they wanted to have the tracks in shape for hauling..

Leonard: Hauling heavier equipment and things. Okay.

Leonard: How many miles were you responsible for?

Addison: Well, I don't know, really. Nearly every town had a section crew, maybe six or eight men, to maintain track, but they couldn't keep it all up a lot of times, and the extra gang came in and kind of picked up and helped them service track: pull the ties and replace them, raise the track, put more rock under it, and level it.

Leonard: And you actually lived in one of the cars?

Addison: Yes, they had boxcars that had bunk beds in them, and we slept in there. They had a diner, a boxcar where they had a big cold range, and my sister and my brother-in-law cooked for the gang I was working on. They had a long table in there, and they fed us in there.

Leonard: How long at a time would you be in the gang? Did you go home on weekends?

Addison: Yeah. You usually got off at noon Saturday and went home. So we did that on the main line, and then later when we were servicing track, we were up at Dubois near Radom.

Leonard: Illinois?

Addison: Yeah. Then from there, we went to what they call the Edgewood Cutoff. That's further east of the mainline. We went from Bluford, Illinois to Fulton, Kentucky, I believe. There's three tunnels down there—one of them's over a mile long. They had shipped the 110-pound steel. We took up on the main line down there. Well, that was only 90-pound steel down there. That was mainly just freight—coal and stuff like that—but they'd run a cornbelt special two-car passenger train later that year. We laid the 110-pound steel down there and took up the 90-pound. While we were working in that area, our cars were at Reevesville and Big Bay. That's when I got my notice to appear to be drafted, because I registered. People who

were twenty when they first registered for the draft had to register then again July after they had become twenty-one.

Leonard: And that was you?

Addison: Yeah, I was in that group. It wasn't just a month or so after that, they called me to be examined, the physical and all, and I got my notice then on September thirteenth.

Leonard: Nineteen forty-one?

Addison: Nineteen forty-one, yes.

Leonard: And you went where?

Addison: Well, we got on a train at Anna, Illinois and went to Chicago to have our physicals and be inducted into the Army. I spent all day with no clothes on, mostly, (Leonard laughs) going through lines.

Leonard: Getting poked and...

Addison: Yep.

Leonard: Do you get all your shots in one day, or (laughs) what was that?

Addison: No. No, we didn't get them all in one day. They sent us then, after we were sworn in, to Camp Grant up near Elgin.

Leonard: Oh, that's near Elgin. Okay, okay.

Addison: I was there about a week, I think, and then of course they're sending people out to different areas where they needed them. Anyway, they wanted me to enlist for three years. I said, "No, I don't think so." They said, "If you don't enlist for three years"—they told me all the advantages I'd get if I'd enlist for three years—"If you don't enlist, then you're going to Camp Wallace, Texas." I said, "Well, I'm going to Camp Wallace, Texas, then." (Leonard laughs) So that's where I went. That's where I had my basic training. Did a lot of infantry drill and such as that and study some.

Leonard: So this was infantry?

Addison: No, it was coast artillery and anti-aircraft.

Leonard: Now, this is at Camp Wallace...

Addison: Yeah.

Leonard: ...you were learning this? Okay.

Addison: Yeah, we took our basic training. I think it was supposed to be about twenty-six weeks. But we got down there in late October sometime and left there just about the first of January. Anyway, we trained on a three-inch gun, the coast artillery and antiaircraft. I was classified as a gunner. We never did get to fire. We were all supposed to go to fire down at Camp Fort Crockett down on the beach by Galveston, and the first sergeant came over to us. We was lined up at the mess hall to eat dinner early. He said, "Just go on back to the barracks; we don't have any guns. We've shipped them all to the West Coast." That was after the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor.

Leonard: Okay, I was going to get to that. So were you at Camp Wallace at the time that Pearl Harbor took place?

Addison: Yeah, mm-hmm. Yeah.

Leonard: Oh, okay. So you were already at Fort Wallace?

Addison: Camp Wallace, yeah.

Leonard: —Camp Wallace in Texas, and that's when Pearl Harbor took place. Okay.

Addison: Yeah, and then about the first of the year—I think about the first of January—they sent us to Camp Davis, North Carolina. Trained on antiaircraft and coast artillery, and they put us in the balloon barrage. They were starting a battalion of balloon barrage at Camp Davis, North Carolina, We went up there and was there just about a month, I think, training.

Leonard: Well, tell me about the balloon—this was rather a new concept, wasn't it?

Addison: Well, yes. The English had been using them, but I don't know if that was the first battalion they'd formed. I know after we was in Hawaii for a while, they sent back a bunch of our men to close to Paris, Tennessee. They started a new camp just for barrage balloons.

Leonard: In Paris, Tennessee?

Addison: Yeah. We stayed there about a month, and then they sent us to Mare Island, Vallejo, California. We were issued balloons and equipment, set them up. The purpose of those barrage balloons was to keep low-level or dive-bombers away, keep them above where they couldn't do so much damage.

Leonard: I see, so they wouldn't strafe and come in low on an emplacement?

Addison: Yeah.

Leonard: So that was a part of your coastal defense training?

Addison: Well, yeah, We actually set up these balloons and flew them there for several months, but we were all set to go somewhere—they didn't tell us where—but we had packed up all of our equipment, crated it, and had it all at the headquarters area where it could be shipped out. I got word one night—I was in Vallejo on leave—that all servicemen were to report back to the bases immediately. They had a scare, thought there were Japanese bombers down around Los Angeles, they said.

Leonard: Los Angeles?

Addison: Mm-hmm, that area. But anyway, we went back to base, had to get all our equipment—we had it crated and stenciled and so forth—had to go out there. They wanted us to have those balloons a-flying by daylight.

Leonard: That was quite a job, wasn't it?

Addison: Yeah. I've often wondered if that was just training. They did later send a battalion down there around LA.

Leonard: In your battalion, how many balloons were there?

Addison: Let's see... I think it's about thirty-two.

Leonard: Oh, really. Thirty-two balloons.

Addison: We had four batteries, headquarters battery and then A, B, C, and D.

Leonard: Gun emplacements?

Addison: That was balloons. Flew those balloons usually around five thousand feet, and of course flew them more at night than they did in the daytime.

Leonard: But when you say "battery," are you including your antiaircraft gun with that?

Addison: No, that changed later. After they kind of got on the offense instead of defense, then they did away with the barrage balloons and they gave us thirty-seven millimeter antiaircraft weapons, antiaircraft automatic weapons, the 861st Battalion.

Leonard: Is that your battalion?

Addison: Yeah. When I was balloon battalion, it was 305th.

Leonard: Oh, I see. So the barrage balloons preceded the ant-aircraft ?

Addison: Yeah. They was on the defense, and they sent us to Hawaii. We were there about eighteen months, and they did away with the balloons there, gave us these automatic anti-aircraft weapons. Then before we left there to go down in the

combat area, they issued us the forty millimeter antiaircraft gun, and called it an M-51—it's four-fifty caliber, air-cooled fifties, mounted on a trailer—

and set it up in one area. Then just a little farther over, somewhere would be the forty millimeter. That's all under one sergeant.

Leonard: And they would coordinate fire together?

Addison: Well, I was on the forty millimeter gun. The M-51 was set off away from us, oh, maybe a fourth of a mile or more, maybe half a mile, and they had a crew that stayed with that—I forget how many men. I think we had about seven or eight that stayed at ours, and they had about five or six in the other one. We were sent to Leyte in the Philippines.

Leonard: Well, first, I want to ask you one thing. What were these balloons filled with?

Addison: Hydrogen. They was very, very explosive if you got right at mixture of oxygen, and hydrogen.

Leonard: So it was very dangerous to fill them.

Addison: Yes, they claimed. We weren't allowed to wear any wool clothing or anything working around them that would cause a static spark of electricity; if they had a leak, it could cause them to blow up. I was a gas man, they called me, for the barrage balloons. I had to help inflate them and get them all set up. My job every day was to take a sample of the gas, send it to headquarters, and they always tested them every day to see what the purity was, the content.

Leonard: Of the mixture in the balloon?

Addison: Yeah. If it got below a certain point, they'd let out some of it and put in fresh to bring it back up.

Leonard: And how long did it take to fill a balloon like that?

Addison: Well, I don't remember. I'd say an hour or two, maybe. I think we kept about 150 cylinders of gas on hand all the time—hydrogen gas.

Leonard: Again, how many in your battalion? About thirty-two of these?

Addison: Well, with squads we had eight squads or sites, balloon sites, for battery A, B, C, and D. (pause) We were stationed there in Hawaii right off the end of Hickham Field at Fort Kamehameha, but they called it Fort Kam. But if we have balloons in the air, if it's day or night, and those planes want to take off from Hickham Field, we'd have to go out and bring them balloons down, tie them down.

Leonard: Did you winch them down?

Addison: Yes, they had a four-cylinder engine with I think a five-sixteenths cable. I think it had nine thousand feet of cable on it, but ordinarily we didn't go over five thousand feet. When it got windy or something, it was hard to control them; they go to diving and doing maneuvers. We'd have to sometimes pull them down on that account. But they were stationed all around the Pearl Harbor area, Hickham Field and the naval yard.

Leonard: So if our pilots wanted to take off, you would have to winch them down for them, and when they came in, I guess the same thing.

Addison: Yeah, yeah. We had a radio and a telephone at each site and had a guard walking post and had one in on the communications—two men that had to be on there all the time. Usually we would just wake up our own relief, and they'd come out and take over. You'd be on communications two hours, and then you'd be walking post two hours.

Leonard: I see. So at Fort Kamehameha, is that when you were issued orders to go to Leyte?

Addison: No. They broke the batteries up and transferred some guys out when they did away with the balloons, and we were trained on these automatic weapons.

Leonard: Let me just ask—how long were you involved in the balloons? The balloons were, what, about a year?

Addison: Oh, it'd have been—I would say pretty close to two years—the training and actually on the West Coast and then in Hawaii.

Leonard: Then they just went exclusively toward the gun emplacements.

Addison: Yes. Crated up the balloons and equipment—what happened to it, I don't know—but we got the anti-aircraft automatic weapons.

Leonard: Didn't you say that you had to memorize the shapes of planes?

Addison: Oh, we had a lot of aircraft recognition, particularly the Japanese, Australian, and our own planes. They would flash videos, just a blink of an eye, you'd miss them, but you're supposed to be able to identify them like that. We had a lot of classes on that.

Leonard: To try to simulate—you'd have to make a decision quite quickly to determine...

Addison: Whether it was enemy or friendly.

Leonard: Yeah, right, right. So you were a gunner, then.

Addison: Yeah.

Leonard: From a gasman to a gunner, right? Is that pretty much true? (laughs)

Addison: Yeah, I guess so. I think on my discharge, it said I supervised a seven-man gun crew, I believe. (laughs)

Leonard: You attained corporal, and you were in charge of seven men?

Addison: Yeah, under the sergeant. We had a squad sergeant. But they had three other—let's see—been so long I can't remember. The T/4s and T/5s, and then they were saying it was sergeant and corporal.

Leonard: Oh, sure, the rank.

Addison: Yeah, yeah.

Leonard: So after Hawaii, where did you go then?

Addison: Went to the Philippines, Leyte Island; they were beginning to reclaim some of the islands and stuff over there.

Leonard: From the Japanese?

Addison: Yeah. We were scheduled to go in to the first landing, but for some reason, they put another antiaircraft battalion in, in our stead, and I don't know why, but we didn't go in on the initial landing. But later we did go in.

Leonard: Was the initial landing the Battle of Leyte Gulf?

Addison: Well, at that time, yeah.

Leonard: That timeframe, okay. But you came in later, after the initial...

Addison: Yeah, yeah. We got off the ship after dark one night and rode the landing craft in, and it went to raining. They marched up the beach for two or three miles—I don't know how far—but they said, This is your bivouac area, dig in. So we had to dig foxholes and get ready for the night. Of course, it was way after dark. But my name starting with A, so guess who got guard first thing?

Leonard: You did. (laughter)

Addison: Yeah. We changed back when the private and so forth, same way with KP. They'd start A's, and when you moved, they started it all over again. I think I got it pretty often sometimes.

Leonard: Sounds like it. So you dug in, and then eventually you brought in your batteries, your antiaircraft.

Addison: The guns and stuff were brought in, yeah, a little later. I'll never forget that first night I was on guard. It poured down rain all night, and when my time was up, I went to my foxhole and had a buddy and worked together at the pup tent and all. I went back, got in there, and there was water in that foxhole. I dig some sand underneath me and just kind of leaned in the corner and sat up with my poncho over me, tried to keep halfway dry, but it kept raining, and the water kept coming up. I just about raised myself out of the foxhole. (laughter)

Leonard: That'd be a heck of a note, to drown in your own foxhole. (laughter)

Addison: Yeah. When daylight came, we got up and a Japanese officer had floated in on the beach right there where we were bivouacked. There had been a bunch of paratroopers come in trying to retake an airfield, San Pablo Airstrip.

Leonard: You mean Japanese air troopers, paratroopers?

Addison: Yeah, they came in and they shot some of them down. This one had come in, had landed on the beach. He was an officer—I don't know what rank—but he had a carbine and an automatic handgun, and he had hand grenades, and he had blocks of TNT strapped on him. So guys went out there and started taking everything they could use for a souvenir. He had two battle flags on him, I think. They took all the gear they could use for souvenirs, his gun and things like that, flags. And so the Filipinos came along, they stripped all of his clothing off of him, down to his boots, took that. So he didn't have much left out there.

Leonard: It didn't sound like it. (laughter) Little did he know he would end up that way, I'm sure. (laughs) So how long did you stay in this position on Leyte, on the beach there?

Addison: I can't remember exactly. I imagine three or four months. But anyway, eventually, we were put in a staging area and getting ready to go on farther down. Incidentally, the first ship we rode out of Honolulu down to Leyte—I think it was—we were on that ship fifty-eight days.

Leonard: Oh, no.

Addison: And there wasn't any ventilation to speak of down below. They said we left under protest, when we left Pearl Harbor, because the ventilation wasn't working right. People would sleep on the deck and all around, lifeboats—they would run them out of that. But the steel deck was pretty hard.

Leonard: Oh, I bet it was. The sand probably was a welcome site. (laughs) That's a long time, fifty-eight days.

Addison: And the bunks we slept in were five high down below, and it was hot down there.

Leonard: Yeah, I'm sure. Did you see any combat? Did any Japanese planes try to come in during that time when you were emplacement? Your emplacement was on the beach there in Leyte?

Addison: Yeah, we had a few that got into the area and dropped some bombs and strafed a little. Our mess hall was down close to the airstrip, and they had dug foxholes and tunnels and covered them over with logs and dirt and stuff.

Leonard: The Japanese had?

Addison: No. Our mess crew headquarters. The Japanese came in there one night and bombed them pretty close. And the next day or two, somebody stuck up a sign out there over those trenches they'd covered up that said, "Through these portals pass some of the fastest mortals." (laughter)

Leonard: I'm sure of that. (laughs) But you weren't really in danger?

Addison: Well, we didn't ever have to get up and fire, you know, on the front lines. We were around airstrips and harbors and stuff all the time. And that was one good thing about getting in early. We was on defense. (laughs) Later, they started sending in the infantry and stuff, and those replacements they'd send down there, these kids didn't look like they was old enough to be weaned, hardly. They didn't have any beard or anything, and just out of high school, a lot of them.

Leonard: Boy, it makes you wonder, doesn't it?

Addison: No, I think it's terrible.

Leonard: So you were there for three or four months, and then where did you go? What was your next assignment?

Addison: We loaded up on the ship and we just cruised around there for about ten days, and they did fire practice, gunnery practice and stuff, the Navy did. And we finally took off.

Leonard: Well, would you crate your guns?

Addison: No, no, they weren't crated; they had put grease on them, and the bore—barrel—stuff was covered, the breach and so forth. It's been so long now, I'm kind of fuzzy on the times and the dates and stuff, but we went from Leyte, after cruising around there for about ten days, to (pause) Eniwetok, I believe.

Leonard: Is that a small island?

Addison: Well, it's called an atoll. It's kind of a string of islands.

Leonard: In the Pacific?

Addison: Yeah, yeah. I think we stayed there sixteen days in the harbor, then we went to Ulithi Island, a little closer to Okinawa, and then we stayed there fourteen days on the ship. There was a lot of ships anchored there.

Leonard: What year are we talking about now?

Addison: It would have been about '44 or '45.

Leonard: So you were making your way toward the Japanese mainland, right?

Addison: Yeah, they had told us we was going to invade the Japanese mainland.

Leonard: They had told you that?

Addison: They said, Expect every man, woman, and child to fight to the death. But we invaded Ulithi, and they gave us a battle star for that, but then they took it away, said we never did unload. (Leonard laughs) Japanese slipped in there one time, and there's two tankers tied together. They torpedoed them; they burned.

Leonard: Two tankers?

Addison: Mm-hmm. The destroyer chasers run around there throwing depth charges and stuff around the area.

Leonard: Did they think it was a submarine?

Addison: Yeah, I figured it was as submarine. It might have been a small one.

Leonard: So what you're telling me is that there were a lot of ships that had anchored there around Ulithi, and they were a kind of a staging area, was it?

Addison: I guess it was.

Leonard: And they told you that it was just a foregone conclusion that they would eventually try to invade?

Addison: Yeah, yeah.

Leonard: Now, did you go to Okinawa?

Addison: Yeah, when we left the Ulithi, the major that was commanding the troops on that ship said it was the first time he ever saw them leave a harbor area under full steam. It didn't travel too fast, but it was going as fast as it'd go, getting it out of there and dispersing some of those ships. But we ended up eventually going to Okinawa. The China Sea was real rough. You could see the bow of some of the ships of the convoy—you could see under the bow, and then they'd go down and you'd see the prop a-spinning on the back. The waves was huge. But I think it was the first of April. I can't remember for sure. Anyway, they claimed there was

fourteen hundred ships in that flotilla that went into Okinawa. So that's counting landing craft and all that.

Leonard: Now, was this before the invasion of Okinawa which you're telling me about?

Addison: Well, it's the preparation for it, yeah.

We went in there, and then they started unloading. We didn't unload the first day, I don't think. But we went in to set up at Kadena Airstrip on the end of it. It was a dirt strip the Japanese used for fighter planes and stuff. We weren't there long until they had it all blacktopped and had revetments all down the sides for the fighter planes to get in.

Leonard: Is that where you guys set up your battery on that Kadena?

Addison: Yeah, on that Kadena airstrip, we was there for two or three months, and then they moved us up to a different airstrip. (pause)I can't remember what the name of that strip was right now. (pause)

Leonard: Was it north of Kadena?

Addison: Yeah, I think it was.

Leonard: Okay. So you moved to another emplacement and airstrip?

Addison: Yeah, yeah.

Leonard: Was this all during the time of the invasion of Okinawa?

Addison: Mm-hmm. Yeah, we moved a time or two.

Leonard: As the battlefield moved?

Addison: Well, I don't know if that was it or not, but anyway, we never got anything but some artillery shells and few bombs.

Leonard: Then I guess at that time, the war was coming close to being over, but you didn't know it at the time, did you?

Addison: No, we didn't know really, but after Japan said they surrender, they put out word for us there'd be a white plane to bring their officials, and not to fire on it, that it would be a white plane so we could tell what it was. It was coming in I guess from Japan. And then of course they ended up getting on the battleship *Missouri* and signing the papers.

Leonard: Did the plane actually land on the battleship?

Addison: No, no. It landed on Okinawa. I didn't ever see it. That was the idea I got, they was going to land there somewhere on Okinawa.

Leonard: Oh, I see, and ferry over to the...

Addison: Well, I don't know. It was later that they had that ceremony on the battleship in Tokyo.

Leonard: I see. Well, when did you find out that the war had actually ended? (pause) Which base were you at?

Addison: We was there on Okinawa.

Leonard: Oh, Okinawa? Okay.

Addison: Yeah. They had told us we was going to have to go to Japan.

Leonard: So you actually were prepared to go as an infantryman?

Addison: No, we didn't.

I guess we'd have been antiaircraft.

Leonard: Anti-aircraft, okay.

Addison: But they didn't have many planes left, though, at that time; there's no telling what they'd have done with us. The Japs had used up all their kamikaze planes and they'd—

Leonard: Did you ever see a kamikaze?

Addison: Well, I've seen them dive, yeah, and there wasn't no way of stopping them except a direct hit and just blow them apart.

Leonard: But did you actually see one in action?

Addison: Yeah, I seen one hit a ship, yeah.

Leonard: Okay, I see. It must have been quite a relief to know the war was over.

Addison: It was, it was. We was wanting to go home. They said they didn't have any transportation. There were 1400 ships as far as you could see, and the airfields was all covered with planes. (laughter)

Leonard: So was this about—

Addison: I think it was August, wasn't it, when the war ended over there?

Leonard: Yeah, I think so, of 1945.

Addison: Because when we left, there were still Japs out in the caves and stuff. We'd be watching the movie at night and see flamethrowers and stuff over there on the hillside to clean them out of those caves.

Leonard: You mean when you would watch a movie outside on the tarmac or something?

Addison: Yeah.

Leonard: Well, it sounds like you had quite an experience from southern Illinois and growing up (laughs) in the country to going overseas and serving your country.

Addison: Yeah. I left home October 13th in '41, and I didn't see home again till about October the 20th, I think, in '45.

Leonard: Four years.

Addison: Never had a furlough in all the time I was there.

Leonard: Wow, that's amazing.

Addison: And we got back to Fort Sheridan. They told us when we was on the ships, When you get in there, there'll be trains a-waiting for you to take you to separation center. You know what? We stayed at Vancouver Barracks about a week before they ever got a train to take us to Chicago.

Leonard: Vancouver...?

Addison: Washington.

Leonard: Washington State. Okay. (laughs) You couldn't get home fast enough, could you?

Addison: No. Then they said they didn't have room for us in Fort Sheridan, said, We're going to furlough you for ten days. Go home and then come back in ten days and get your furlough.

Leonard: Oh, no. (laughs) Well, is there anything else you want to add to this record? I think we had a pretty good dialogue.

Addison: There'd be a lot of it if I'd think for a while.

Leonard: Yeah. Well, we might do this again sometime. You never know.

Addison: But off the cuff like this, it's kind of hard to put it all together.

Leonard: Yeah. Well, I think we did a good job.

Addison: After how many years? From '41 to present time...

Leonard: Yeah. Well, I think you did a good job, and I appreciate your taking the time and sharing this with us. This will go into the oral history program “Veterans Remember”, and I thank you for being with us, and thank you for serving your country.

Addison: Thank you for your effort and time and being my son-in-law. (laughter)

Leonard: That too. (laughs) I appreciate you too. Thanks.

(end of interview)