

**This interview is being conducted on Thursday, August 10, 2017. I am speaking with Bruce Alan Cala, who served in the United States Navy – C Bs and is a veteran of World War II. Mr. Cala heard of the Veterans History Project through the White Oak Library in Lockport, Illinois, and he has kindly consented to participate in the National Archives Veterans History Project. Here is his story:**

**Bruce, when and where were you born?**

Gary, Indiana. November 19, 1926.

**What were your parents' occupations?**

Well, My mother was a waitress, my father took off when I was six years old, so [[ but later, I didn't know it, but he owned a couple of restaurants. So I guess you'd say he was a restaurateur or something.

**So your father left the family but you knew him at a later date?**

No, I never saw him again.

**How old were you when he left?**

Six years old.

**So you found out later that he owned restaurants?**

I found out later that he owned restaurants, but I never had any contact with him after six years old.

**Did you have any brothers and sisters?**

Yes, one brother and two sisters.

**Did your siblings ever serve in the military?**

Yeah, my other brother – we're twins, except he's six feet – evidently, he was mal-nourished; he was tall and skinny, but he was six feet.

**And how tall are you?**

About 5'4" – 5'5".

**So you are unusual twins then, I would say, right?**

Yes. We were both born at the same time but I don't know why – I kept thinking why wasn't I the six foot? Ha, ha.

**Exactly, ha, ha. Was your brother in the service?**

Yes; he was in the Navy a year ahead of me. He went in when he was 17. I waited till I was drafted at 18.

**Oh, you were drafted.**

Yeah, because they rejected me when I was 17.

**What did you do before entering the service?**

Well, I quit high school. I only had one year of high school. I stayed home with my mother to take care of the family, so I was a mail clerk, part-time.

**So you never finished high school?**

Yeah, well, I didn't then. Years later I took the GED when I was in the Navy and I passed it and I later got my diploma.

**So you were drafted – how did you get into the Navy?**

The first time I tried to enlist, the doctor shook his head and said no, I was a 17 ½ year old punk with one year of high school. He shook his head and said no, you're too mal-nourished.

**What year was that when you enlisted?**

1944.

**And when did you finally go in?**

December of 1944.

**And how long were you in the service?**

Fifteen months.

**So you got out in March of '45?**

I got out in June of '46.

**Well, that's 18 months.**

Maybe it is.

**So you were drafted into the Navy – how did you get into the Navy?**

I was drafted. Well, first I was drafted and they gave me a choice. I wanted to go into the Army like my five brothers; my mother talked me into going in the Navy – it's safer, it's cleaner, the food is better – so they give me a choice; I went in the Navy. She might have saved my life; two of my buddies were killed in the Battle of the Bulge –

**There you go –**

I would have been with them.

**I was going to say why did you choose this specific branch – but that's because your mother talked you into it.**

My mother; she put pressure on me.

**Where did you go to training camp and how was it? How did you get there?**

Well, first, they sent me to Great Lakes for basic training. I think that was like eight weeks. then I volunteered for the Sea Bees with a buddy of mine, and they sent us to Rhode Island for two months' training for C Bs.

**What kind of training was that – what did you do?**

They trained us to unload ships; we were stevedores. My Battalion 3<sup>rd</sup> Specialists; we were stevedores.

**Tell me that again – what battalion?**

3<sup>rd</sup> Special -- that was my Battalion. Third Special C B Battalion – and we unloaded ships; we were stevedores. That's what they trained us to do.

**So that was your specialized training for two months?**

Right. Then they shipped us to California for another month's training.

**What did you do in California?**

Same thing. They trained us again for another month in unloading ships.

**How about any classroom teaching at that time – did you have any classroom sessions?**

In California we had a couple – two or three.

**And what else did you learn – marching, shooting – what else?**

Yeah, I learned how to handle different equipment like bulldozers; I loved to drive a bulldozer.

**What else?**

Of course unloading supplies on the ship –

**But did you learn weapons – shooting or anything?**

Yeah, we did have a little bit of that.

**Some weapons.**

Yeah, some weapons. They taught us how to use an M-1 -- which is a great rifle. Put a whole clip in there and use it like a machine gun. They taught us how to use an M-1 and target practice and all that stuff. We weren't expecting to be in combat though.

**Right.**

I actually was in combat for maybe two minutes.

**Just a minute – we'll get there. How did you adapt to military life – the physical regimen and the barracks, the food and whatever – the social life?**

I didn't have any problems; I think I was a stoic. I think my early experience growing up made a stoic out of me. I could tell you – you wouldn't believe the stories about me as a stoic.

**Like what – go ahead, tell me –**

The Navy played a trick on me and put me in an all Southern Battalion. After a while – there was a dozen of these boys came up to me and said, "Yankee boy, I wanna be you." And I said why do you wanna be me? And the reason was, I was a stoic. In other words, they said nothing bothers you, which was true; it was true.

**Yeah –**

Even now I'm a bit of a stoic; I've learned to accept just whatever comes my way.

**Okay.**

Good or bad; I don't complain. If it's good, okay; bad, that's okay too.

**So you adapted pretty well to military life.**

Yes.

**That's the bottom line.**

Yeah, I did.

**Okay. So after your training in Rhode Island and California, where did you go then? What happened?**

They shipped us right to Okinawa.

**And how did you get to Okinawa?**

How did we get there?

**Yeah. By ship?**

It was on an old Spanish Freighter by the name of *Santa Isabel*.

**Spanish freighter – and how many guys were on that freighter?**

There were 200 of us; we didn't manage the ship. It was managed by the regular crew.

We were just passengers going out.

**And that ship took you to Okinawa?**

Right to Okinawa.

**And what was your job in Okinawa?**

Stevedores, mainly. But we also worked on the airfield; rebuilt the airfield. The Japanese tried to destroy it once they saw they're gonna lose it so we had to rebuild it – fill in holes, level it off –

**You had to build new runways if they bombed them –**

Yep.

**And was that your job for the whole time you were in Okinawa.**

Well, we had three jobs; the main job was stevedore; but then we took turns working on the airfield. The third job was the worst. I had to bury dead and dying sailors, marines and Army boys. I must have buried a hundred of them.

**Wow**

We'd put them in wooden boxes and bury them on Okinawa. I'm sure they're still there. Most of them looked like they were asleep, but every now and then there was one that was mangled, you know, guts hanging out – head split open. I still have nightmares about it.

**Oh, I'm sure.**

About four or five times a year I have a nightmare – I'm burying some young guy – and one time he wasn't even dead yet! He looked up at me and grabbed my arm.

**That was a dream or did that happen?**

This was on Okinawa.

**That actually happened in Okinawa?**

Yes.

**Oh, wow!**

Yeah, I was burying him and he looked up and grabbed my arm – and he wasn't dead yet. I called the doctor over; the doctor ran over with the stethoscope; then the doctor looked at him and shook his head, and the kid's head dropped and he was gone. I have nightmares about 4 or 5 times a year –

**Really –**

I'm okay – this young guy's looking at me – (sobbing)

**Oh, my God! Unbelievable!**

For a 17 ½ -year old punk, it's quite an experience. I wasn't even mature yet –

**Right.**

I don't think I matured until about 40, to tell you the truth.

**Probably not. Well, I heard stories from the men who picked up the bodies and put them in the truck – but I never heard what happened after they drove off. I knew they would be buried, but –**

I had to do that too –

**Wow!**

Sometimes I'm working on the airfield, driving the bulldozer and a truck came back from the front with dead and dying marines, Army boys; these are guys fighting day after day after day; somebody would say, Hey, SeaBee, help us. So I had to help pull the bodies off and later I helped bury them.

**Wow!**

That was tough!

**Gruesome, what a job; yeah, that was tough!**

That was tough!

**So how long were you in Okinawa?**

I was there till June of '46. See, they had a point system and I didn't have many points. The ones that were in the longest, and the ones in combat, had more points. So I had to wait until June of '46.

**So you were in Okinawa for almost a year.**

Yeah, I got in there a month after the marines invaded, the army invaded Okinawa – They invaded April 1, 1945 and we landed about April 30, 1945; so they were already fighting their way across the island when we landed.

**Okay. And you spent all of your time there on that island.**

Until June of '46. Then they sent me home.

**When you were on the ship Isabel, how was the trip abroad; were the seas rough?**

**How was your voyage? Do you remember?**

The trip to Okinawa itself, on the ship, was fine; there was no problem. Except we were under attack when a Japanese submarine – actually fired two torpedoes at my ship –

**Really!**

But it was getting dark, and I remember we were all up on deck with our life jackets on and my buddy says to me, "Bruce, if that Jap captain doesn't fire those torpedoes in the next 15 minutes, we're okay." I was so stupid; I said why? He said, look, it's getting dark. It gets dark in the western Pacific; otherwise I probably wouldn't be here right now.

Anyway it was dark; we were all up on deck; the ship was zigzagging; all of a sudden the guys on the right started screaming. My buddy says I'll see what they're screaming about. So he ran to the right side of the ship; I was looking straight ahead at the bow. All of a sudden – Whoosh! , I saw it go by almost on the surface. Sometimes torpedoes are right at the surface. I thought Oh, my God. And a few minutes later, -- Whoosh! – another one – Oh, my God. Next thing I know my buddy's patting my shoulder and says, "Bruce, let's get a cup of coffee. Look, it's dark." I think that Jap captain – later I did some research on that – there are certain coordinates they have to figure out before – they don't just see a ship and fire a torpedo. They have to figure out the coordinates. But he didn't have enough time, so I think that Jap captain saw the ship, he knew he didn't have enough time to figure out the coordinates -- shoot the torpedoes, see if he gets lucky.

**Take a chance – yeah!**

So otherwise I probably wouldn't be here right now.

**You're lucky – they both missed your ship! Whew!**

You know later I did research on that; all the guys – there were a thousand ships in WWII. You know the guys that got in the boats, I read that 70% of the time, they never found those guys on the boats.

**Wow!**

Mainly because the ocean is so vast, even though those boats are big, it's still like a little (inaudible) in the ocean –

**Like a cork or something.**

70% they never found; I was lucky; it was getting dark; otherwise I probably wouldn't be here right now.

**So they never shoot any torpedoes in the dark – only in the daytime?**

Yeah, right before it got real dark I saw it.

**But in the normal course they never shoot torpedoes at night?**

Right, right.

**You have described action witnessed – you said there was another incident where you were in action for just a few minutes.**

Yeah, but I was in action again later.

**Okay, would you describe that – was that on Okinawa?**

Yes. See, we worked on the ship for 12 hours as stevedores. Then we get on a boat and go to shore. We get in a truck and go to camp for another 12 hours. And then the next morning we're back on the ship.

**Okay.**

We have one Marine guard on our truck, and there was a fence around it and he was there with his M-1 and his helmet and all that. His job was to protect us from snipers. When the Marines and Army went across the island they bypassed a couple thousand soldiers who became snipers. Okinawa has hundreds of caves. The road that we had to go to camp on went right past the caves.

**Oh, wow!**

There were rice paddies on the right, caves on the left, and we had to go right past the rice – the caves, to get to camp. The snipers killed 50 men in my battalion alone. Then we had one Marine guard. My Sergeant came in the back of the truck and all of a sudden an officers says to me, what's your name, sailor. I just said Cala, sir, Seaman 2<sup>nd</sup> Class. Right away he put a steel helmet on my head and he handed me an M-1. He looked like this and he said, "Sailor, C B, you're the Marine guard on this truck." And I said, "Sir, where is the Marine guard?" He got angry and he said "He's out in the front fighting the Japs! Do you want to take his place?" I said, Uh, No. "Well, then you're the Marine guard." So I was the Marine guard. We must have gone maybe a mile or two and all of a sudden bullets are flying past my head; all the guys are lying down because they don't want to get hit. And suddenly I realize bullets are flying past my head. I don't know why it didn't bother me; tell you the truth, it didn't bother me at all; maybe that's because I'm a stoic. Anyway, I looked and I saw these three green uniforms in front of this cave, and I know you're supposed to aim for their chest, so I went to the one on the left, I aimed for his chest, I squeezed the trigger and he fell back. I aimed at the next one, squeezed the trigger, he fell back. The third one disappeared in a cave. And then when we got back to camp, right after that, some officer came up and said what happened? What happened? One of my buddies jumped up and said "Snipers" – oh, yeah, one of the guys in the back of the truck had jumped up to light a cigarette at the wrong time and he got hit in the shoulder. I remember I turned around and said, "Get him down; get him down." I looked real quick and I saw those three guys that Booth -- (inaudible) – anyway, we got back to camp, and the officer said, "What happened?" – "Sniper, sir and we got one of



the guys in back of the truck. I didn't tell him that my buddy did something stupid and got up to light a cigarette.

**Yeah.**

Anyway, two of my buddies jumped up and – wish they would have kept their damn mouths shut – one of them jumped up and said, “Cala here, he got two of them, sir.” The officer said, “You got two of those snipers?” Another buddy of mine jumped up – “I saw it too, sir. He got two of those snipers.” Then the officer looked at me and said, “What’s your name again, Sailor?” , I said, “Cala, sir, Seaman 2<sup>nd</sup> Class”. He took out pen and paper and wrote my name down and he said, “You got two of those snipers?” I said, “Well, I might have nicked one of them.” Another buddy jumped up, “I saw it too, sir, he got two of them.” The officer said, “You’re the first one to hit the snipers; and they’ve killed 50 men in our Battalion, Sailor. I’m putting you in for a medal.”

**Wow!**

A week later I was supposed to go to Company Headquarters and fill out some forms. A week later had a little ceremony and put a medal on me. I didn't do it.

**What happened?**

I wouldn't do it. And My two sons said, Dad, you should have done it.”

**You should have, yeah.**

No, I wouldn't; you know why I wouldn't do it?

**Why?**

Because every now and then I'm working around the airfield and a truck came back from the front with dead and dying Marines, Army boys, then somebody would say, “Hey, C B, help us.” So I would go over there and help pull those bodies off and then I had to bury them too. I helped bury them. And I thought these are guys that are fighting day after day after day. I was in combat for what – a minute? And they give me a medal? NO! Anyway, at the end of the war, they gave us a couple of medals anyway.

**Which medals did you get? Do you remember?**

They gave us one for the Eastern Pacific Campaign; they gave us one for World War II and I forget what the third one is.

**Do you have your medals in a display case at home?**

I didn't until my wife did it; she put them all in a case with the ribbons that go with them.

Yeah, but those aren't the medals I'm interested in. I have a stepfather that was married to my mother briefly. And he took a liking to me. He was in Patton's Tank Corps in Europe. After a battle he took a medal off a German Officer with the swastika and everything and he gave it to me – and I still got it.

**Wow!**

And then, when I was on Okinawa after a battle, a Marine Sergeant came up to me and said, "What have you got to trade, Sailor?" We used to trade stuff. Well, I had a silk shirt I bought for my mother 'cuz I never had a girlfriend or anything. I had this silk shirt, so I said, "I got this silk shirt for my mother." And he liked it; I said, "What've you got?" He took out a black, shiny metal box that hasn't tarnished in 70 years, and on the outside of this shiny, metal box is Japanese writing. Inside are two Japanese medals and I liked them, so I said, "I'll take the medals." I did. A friend of mine thinks they're valuable because he looked up the name one time and the writing on the outside of the box in Japanese, he believes it's the name of a Samurai family in Japan and he thinks they would pay a fortune for that. Then another friend of mine says, why don't you just give it to them; but then I thought, why should I? They were brutal.

**Yeah.**

They started a war and got a lot of people killed; screw 'em; why should I give them the medal? Hell with them! So I wouldn't do it; I still got it. Somebody told me – my neighbors offered \$500 for each one of them, but, no, I'm gonna keep it for my grand-children.

**Good for you. That's an interesting story.**

With one exception – if somebody in Japan – I know the Samurai history – some of them are rich. If one of them offered me ten grand, I'd probably give it to them.

**Sure, sure; too bad I'm not at your house; I'd take pictures of those medals.**

**We decided that when I do the transcript and bring it to Bruce's house, (right now we're at the library) I will try to get photos of these medals and include them with this story.**

I've got mine and I'll show you the Japanese too.

**Good. So, with all this activity going on and you being in the middle of it, how did you feel about it -- - what were your emotions relating to combat and to witnessing casualties and destruction – just tell me how you felt about it.**

I'll be honest with you, except for the young guys that I buried that weren't quite dead, I didn't show any emotion. I think it's because I was a stoic. See, I learned to just accept whatever comes my way in life. You wouldn't believe the things that happened to me growing up.

**So you were just accepting. But I'm sure it played havoc with your mind and you had nightmares when you came back home – about this.**

I think when I came home, I know there was something wrong with me because – I think I had that stress thing because –

**P T S D?**

Yeah, I couldn't settle down on a job and I must have gone from girlfriend to girlfriend; you know, if one of those women had hung on to me, I would have married her.

**Yeah.**

I didn't get married until the 60s and that was mainly because my buddy fixed me up with this beautiful gal from England.

**Okay.**

And we sort of hit it off, and he kept calling me all the time to get together; and we did and we got along really well and finally one of them suggested, maybe you two should get married – yeah, I guess maybe we should – we did. If one of those earlier women had grabbed a hold of me, I would have married her. But women didn't do that in those days.

**No, they did not; not like today.**

If one of them would have even called me I would have married her; but they didn't do that in those days. They would sit home alone rather than call me.

**Right.**

That's what happened. I was fixed up or I probably would have never got married. I think I'm over that stress thing now. I think I am.

**Okay, it took a long time; it took 50 years or more to get over that.**

It did. I know it's at least 10 or 12 years because I didn't settle down until about 1959 when a buddy of mine was working in a local supermarket and he talked to his boss and he hired me, even though I had a terrible employment record. My buddy talked his boss into hiring me; they trained me as a produce clerk, so for eight years I was a produce clerk. But I started going to night school. I met a young guy going to night school and he

let me go with him because he didn't want to go alone. And I said, look, I'm an Irish guy, I said I'm not a smart guy; I only got one year of high school. He said it's okay, I'm smart, I'll help you. He did. I went to the Junior College and finished there. And then, he was going to Roosevelt and he talked me into going to Roosevelt and they loaned me the money to finish.

**Okay.**

And later when I started teaching I went to night school and got my Master's from DePaul.

**Hmm.**

Then I became a Social Worker, a tax collector and finally a high school history teacher.

**Okay, let's go back to the war. What's the highest rank that you achieved?**

Petty Officer 3<sup>rd</sup> Class.

**And you told me before they kept promoting you.**

My buddies and I, except for that shoot-out, we all did the same job. The only reason I can think I was promoted was because of that shoot-out and the fact that maybe I hit a couple of snipers. And here's what I'm thinking. Later some of those officers must have got together and said, "You know, that little Yankee boy, he won't take no medal." And one of them must have said, "What rank is he?" Let's say he's a Seaman 3<sup>rd</sup> Class. Well, I'd only move him up a bit, so I became Seaman 2<sup>nd</sup>, Seaman 1<sup>st</sup>, Petty Officer. I think that's what happened.

**Okay.**

'Cuz I did the same job as my buddies; the only thing different was that sniper shoot-out.

**Okay; that probably did it; especially if you wouldn't take medals.**

But you know what – that really helped me after the war with getting a job because I remember going to this one office and getting a job and the personnel guy looked up and he said, "Mr. Cala, you've had nine jobs in the last year. Can you explain that?" I said, "No, I can't explain that." Then he looked at me and said, "You were a Petty Officer?" Yes, sir. Usually it took ten years to be a Petty Officer –

**Yes, right.**

So he said, "You were a Petty Officer 3<sup>rd</sup> Class?" Yes, sir. "You're hired!" I wouldn't have hired me – ha, ha.

**Because a Petty Officer is a specialist in something –**

I wouldn't have hired me.

**Okay, so how about friendships that you formed during the service – and camaraderie –**

Well, I told you, they put me in an all southern Battalion – and most of those southern boys are good guys, but – but, there were a few that were still fighting the Civil War –

**Um-hmm –**

That gave me a hard time. But I made friends with two big southerners – one from North Carolina and one from Kentucky – and they were almost like bodyguards –

**Wow!**

If one of these guys was bothering me, they would come up and say, “Hey, he may be a no-good Yankee boy, but he's our buddy, so back off” and they'd back off.

**But did you ever keep in touch with these guys after you got out of the service?**

No, I'm sorry I didn't; you know we all have regrets in life – that's one of the things I regret is after the war I didn't keep in touch with them. But, like I said, I think I had the stress thing, and I think that had something to do with it.

**So how did you stay in touch with your family, your mother and sisters during the war? Did they write letters to you?**

Yeah, I'd write a letter every now and then.

**How long would you say it took mail from home to reach you when you were in Okinawa?**

I think a couple of weeks.

**Did you ever receive packages from home – did your mother send you stuff?**

I think once or twice she did.

**So mostly it was just letters; you just got letters.**

**Okay, and when you were there, was there anyplace you could go when you were off-duty to have a good time someplace? No sports of any kind or anything – baseball –**

Yeah, we did, after the battle was over. See, I had to hang around for another year almost because of the fact that I didn't have many points – the point system.

**Not enough points, yeah.**

Then we had it easy.

**Oh, after the war was over.**

Yeah, we did a little construction work and we played basketball and baseball; we had it pretty easy after that.

**Did you have teams and play against each other?**

Yeah, we did, on occasion. And the natives were real friendly. They were – the Okinawa people are lovely people; they're not really Japanese either. They're a different race. But you know what – I did some research on them later – they actually had a King up until about the 1880s, and Japan came in, got rid of the King and drafted all the young men in the Army, took over the islands. And we excelled them with a big American base and we paid Japan to stay there. And the Okinawa people actually were delightful. Once they found out we weren't going to kill them and rape them and all that. See, the Japanese told them the Americans were going to kill them and rape them; once they found out we were pretty decent people, and weren't going to do that, then we got along with them really good. I love the Okinawa people; they were good to me too. They were lovely.

**So where were you when the war ended?**

I was on Okinawa.

**So that was in 1945, August.**

Yeah, but I didn't get home until June of 1946.

**Right; so you were on Okinawa when the war ended. Was there any big celebration going on at that time?**

Well, the way we knew the war was over – see, after the battle of Okinawa, then we could take it easy more or less, you know. Well, one time – our camp was right off this road and one evening, it must have been a day or two after the war ended, suddenly there were all these trucks with Marines and Army guys going by and they were all shooting off their rifles and pistols. They were screaming and yelling, and I was so stupid, I didn't know what was going on. But I had this buddy who was a little bit older and a little bit wiser, and he turned to me and punched me and said "Bruce, the war is over!" I said "What?" He said, "Yes, why else would they be screaming?" He was right.

**Yeah. Right.**

Then we had a radio too. We turned on the radio and it said the war was over; Japan had accepted the Potsdam Agreement and the stipulations, and so forth and so on.

**Even though the war was over –**

We got our bottles of booze and started to get drunk.

**But even though the war was over, the Japanese who were still on Okinawa didn't know that and didn't surrender, isn't that true? They were still in caves!**

No, by the time the war ended, the Battle of Okinawa was over. They lost almost 100,000 men – the Japanese; only a few hundred surrendered.

**A few hundred surrendered – what about the rest, did they stay in there?**

The rest of them were killed!

**They were killed.**

They lost almost 100,000 men –

**I know, but they said that years later, they still found Japanese living in those caves in Okinawa.**

Oh, yeah, every now and then.

**They didn't believe – or they just couldn't give up; they couldn't surrender.**

You're right. Every now and then, like 30 years later, it wasn't just Okinawa; it was also the Marshalls, and the Carolan Islands – they found some poor guy that was living in a cave for 30 years.

**Right. Unbelievable. So the war was over and you were coming home. How did you return home?**

By ship.

**Was it a troop ship?**

Yeah, a troop ship.

**And how was your journey back – the crossing?**

It was good; it was easy too. We didn't have to do much because they had the regular crew to manage the ship. We played poker and gambled and stuff –

**Okay. You didn't run into rough weather or anything?**

Nothing serious.

**How was your reception by family and friends when you came home?**

There was no reception; for me there was no reception.

**Oh, okay. Did you just go home to your Mom's house?**

Yes. I remember I got in a – when I got to Chicago I just got in a taxi and he took me home. My Mother was there, I know; she gave me a hug and said, "Welcome home, Sonny boy."

**Wow! So have you had any contact with fellow veterans over the years?**

Yeah, I go to the VFW every now and then.

**So you're a member of the VFW?**

Yeah, I'm a member of the Lockport VFW. Yeah, but you know what – I'm a lot older because there's only a few WWII guys left. Since I've been there I think I met three WWII guys; all the rest of them are Viet Nam.

**Yeah. Have you ever taken that Honor Flight back to Washington, D.C. – Do you want to take it? It's a long day; they had it yesterday from Midway Airport – they had 5 WWII veterans and 105 Viet Nam veterans. But you have to be at Midway Airport at 4 a.m. and then they spend the whole day in Washington.**

Yeah, they called me a number of times – but I'm lazy and I don't need any honors.

**Well, Bruce isn't interested in going on the Honor Flight.**

The ones who should be honored are those young men who died.

**Yeah, all the heroes are dead, you're right; exactly.**

Those are the ones that should be honored. I was just a guy doing his job, that's all.

**How – by looking back now, how did your wartime experience affect your life – how did it affect you?**

Well, I think it made a zombie out of me for about ten years.

**Really!**

Yeah, I think I had the stress – because I couldn't settle down to a job; I couldn't settle down to a girlfriend; couldn't get married. I remember once, I used to go to the dances in Chicago on the South Side and I never forgot I went past this group of girls and I heard one of them turn to the other girls and say, "He's a cute guy, but he's messed up."

**Oh, really!**

Then I realized that I had – I knew something was wrong because even on a job I couldn't stay more than a month or two, then I'd quit. Then I'd say, why did I quit? I liked that job.

**How about your twin brother? How was he when he came out? Did it bother him too?**

Somehow nothing seemed to bother him.

**What was his name – you never told me his name**

James – James Richard Cala. He passed away a few years ago.

**So he's gone now.**



He actually saw more combat than I did. I only saw that one time; he was in four invasions -- Iwo, Tarawa, Saipan and another one.

**Wow! Did anybody ever take his history?**

No; that's too bad because he said the worst was Iwo; that was when they – he got pinned down – his job was to drive the Marines right up on the beach; and he got pinned down at Iwo for six hours –

**Wow!**

Until the next wave came in and took the beach. And he said he picked up an M-1 from a dying Marine and was shooting back at the Japanese.

**Was he the LST driver?**

Yeah, he was the guy that drove them right up on the beach. His ship got pinned down; he said he got pinned down on the beach at Iwo; he got a lot of medals.

**So what were the life lessons that you learned from the military?**

What life lessons did I learn?

**Yeah, what lessons did you learn that stays with you until today?**

Well, one thing I learned, mainly since they put me in an all southern battalion, most of them were good guys; there were a few still fighting the Civil War, that gave me a hard time, but most of them were good guys. But I kinda learned that people are the same everywhere; the southern boys, despite their accent and this and that, most of them were no different than I was. And most of them were poor kids like I was; and they were poor too, probably even more than I was. In the South they're in the Great Depression; they had a rough time, you know.

**Yeah, I know.**

But most of them were good guys; we had hillbillies from West Virginia; everybody called them hillbillies. The other southern boys wouldn't have anything to do with them and they would say to me, every now and then, "Hey, Yankee boy, don't go hanging around with them hillbilly guys; they all got knives and will cut your throat when you're sleeping." You know why! West Virginia had broke away from Virginia – because they didn't have much in common with the slaves and the big plantations – and they fought for the North –

**Oh, really!**

That's why the southern boys wouldn't have anything to do with them. But you know these hillbilly guys, they all liked me 'cuz I was the Yankee boy. So I used to hang

around with them. And they used to go behind their tent at night and start a bonfire and sing all these hillbilly songs – country music today, they call it. I loved it. My favorite one was The Wabash Cannonball; that's one of those you could yodel.

**Ha, ha.**

And I actually bought a copy of country music a couple of months ago and it's got the Wabash Cannonball on it; once a month I play it. I love those guys but most of them were illiterate; they only had like a 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> grade education.

**I know.**

And I used to write letters for them. I learned every southern girl has three names – they never use just one. At the end of the war, three of them came up to me and gave me their address in the hills of West Virginia. And they said Yankee boy, when you go back to Chicago, don't you marry one of them no-good Yankee girls, 'cuz we're gonna fix you up with Ellie Mae Williams' cousin. You need a real hillbilly girl to make a man out of you. I never made it to West Virginia, mainly because I was afraid of hillbilly girls; I thought I'd be dead in a month – too much for me.

**Ha, ha, well, you're still here. How old are you now?**

Ninety.

**You just turned 90; God Bless You!**

I put myself on the three-year plan. I give myself three more years to live and if I'm still alive at the end of three years, I give myself another three years.

**Ha, ha! (further dialogue not transcribed)**

**Well, Bruce, I thank you very much for this interview and thank you for your service to our country; it's an honor to meet you.**

**Bruce Alan Cala**

**17029 Como Avenue**

**Lockport, IL 60441**

**815-588-0105**

P.S. I returned to Bruce's home and took photos of the medals; they are enclosed herein.

## **Addendum**

**How did you get to become a high school history teacher? You said you had trouble keeping jobs.**

The only subject I ever liked was history. I was in Sixth Grade and the teacher whacked me across the head and said "Bruce, what are you gonna do with your miserable life?" And I remember saying to her, "some day I'm going to be a high school history teacher". Remember I told you I was in a supermarket for 8 years. I started going to night school; I finished Junior College and he talked me into going to Roosevelt and I had to major in something, so it was History. Later I got a Master's in History from DePaul. Yeah, and I was lucky; I ended up at Morgan Park, which was a really good school. One of the bright Irish kids from Beverly got a scholarship to West Point and I met a member of his family who said he's in Afghanistan and he's two steps below a General. Wow!

One of the black girls, they couldn't go to Morgan Park unless you had a B Average and no discipline problems; later they threw that out so it's different now. One of the black girls was in a club I had and I knew good things were gonna happen, but not that good. She became the first black female astronaut, yeah, Mae Jellison. They just opened up a new elementary school in the area. She was in a club I had and she was delightful.

### **Interesting –**

A third student of mine is a Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin, so I had really good kids; they were great, those kids.

**Very good; you had a very colorful life, I would say.**

Dr. Mae Jellison, she comes to Chicago every now and then because her family still lives in the Morgan Park area.

**Right, wonderful, very good. I'm so glad we got together.**

I wanted to do something else before I started teaching so I applied and got hired by Cook County Public Aid and I was a Social Worker for two years.

**That must have been interesting too.**

Yeah, I had mostly what they call ADC cases; women with small children. They also had General Assistance, which was for alcoholics. You'd be surprised how many of those women tried to seduce me ---- further dialogue not transcribed

