

The National Museum of the Pacific War

**Center for Pacific War Studies
Fredericksburg, Texas**

**Interview with
Mr. Michael N. Kuryla, Jr.
United States Navy
USS Indianapolis
Date of Interview: 10 August 2007**

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Mr. Zambrano: This is Mike Zambrano. Today is the 10th of August, 2007. I'm interviewing Mr. Michael N. Kuryla, Jr. He is at his home in Bartlett, Illinois and I am interviewing him over the telephone from my home in Round Rock, Texas. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War studies, archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, and Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to this site. Good morning, sir. How are you doing?

Mr. Kuryla: Doing fine.

Mr. Zambrano: Well, let's start off with where and when you were born?

Mr. Kuryla: I was born on September the 10th, 1925, in Chicago, Illinois.

Mr. Zambrano: What were your parent's names and what did they do?

Mr. Kuryla: I was named junior because my dad's name was Michael, too, and I was named after my dad, and my mother's name was Rose. My dad came from the old country. He was a farmer and he didn't have much schooling or education, but he did work in the steel mills and when he first came over he worked in the forests in New York cutting trees down for railroad ties to pay for his way when he was on the ship coming from the old country here. My mother was young when she came here, too, like sixteen or seventeen years old and they met in New York and that's where they married.

Mr. Zambrano: I'm curious, you said 'old country': which one would that be?

Mr. Kuryla: That was Poland.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, okay. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Mr. Kuryla: I have six sisters and one brother.

Mr. Zambrano: Wow! That's a pretty big family.

Mr. Kuryla: Yes, that's a big family.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about your growing up? It looks like you went through part of the Depression.

Mr. Kuryla: I went through the Depression. A lot of times we were wondering where our next meal would come from. My dad didn't have any work and the kids, whenever we went out and did anything; we'd always bring back fifty cents or a quarter. Whatever we made we'd give it to mother and that would be used for purchasing food. Finally, my dad got into the WPA that was started by President Roosevelt and got to work on these public jobs that they did around the city in Chicago. She stayed home with the children.

Mr. Zambrano: So it sounds like before that point it was a family effort to contribute?

Mr. Kuryla: Yes, it was. We all worked together and we were happy. We didn't have much but we were really happy with what we had and we got along, let's put it that way. You would meet people and everybody was friendly to each other. We all had the same problems trying to survive. I did a lot of fishing in Lake Michigan and I'd bring fish home and we'd share it with the people in the building. We lived in a flat; they call it an apartment now. We'd have maybe four or five apartments or flats in the building and we'd share with everybody. Give everybody fish or if somebody went mushroom hunting they'd give us mushrooms, things like that. We were happy. We had a lot of

fun. The kids were running around. We used to run barefooted, you know.
We had good times.

Mr. Zambrano: It sounds like it.

Mr. Kuryla: Yes.

Mr. Zambrano: So did you go through all your education up to high school in that area?

Mr. Kuryla: I went to the grammar schools there and then I went to Lane Tech High School in Chicago. It was close to forty-five hundred students there and all boys, it was an all boy's high school.

Mr. Zambrano: And you probably graduated in '42 or '43?

Mr. Kuryla: No, I left school and joined the navy but I came back and got my diploma and then, of course, I'd go out on speaking engagement about the ship that I was on. And they'd ask me to do some talking at Lane Tech when they'd called me and they didn't know that I went there and that I'd gotten my diploma from a GED test that I took. They were so happy to get me there to speak to the students. I went there twice. It was nice and they were so happy. When they introduced they said, 'Mike, came to Lane ...' and all the students just applauded. It was nice.

Mr. Zambrano: So it was coming full circle?

Mr. Kuryla: It was. I went down the corridors I used to walk and it's still the same school. It's a big school. As a matter of fact when my dad worked for the WPA, they built a stadium there and it's still standing today. So my dad did that. And then he taught at the school. He was very happy when they asked him to teach the kids. It was a technical school also and it was college prep

and technical and my dad was asked to show the students how to make these molds for the foundry when they poured metal. He was teaching over there and he'd always come home and say, 'Look at me. With no education I'm a teacher!' It was so funny, he'd say, 'I come from the old country and I didn't even go to school'. He'd say that because in the old country (Poland) they'd send the oldest son to school.

Mr. Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Kuryla: And, of course, my dad and his other brother, the Russians put them into their army and my dad and his brother deserted the Russian Army, they didn't want to serve. That's when they came to the United States. They just left. He said, 'I'm not going to polish any boots of a Russian officer'. And he said, 'I'm going to the United States where you're free!' So he was good. He taught me a lot of things and he knew a lot of trades. He was very good in building and construction and things of that nature ... hard work, you know. Of course, all of us tried to go to school to finish and only one went to college. My youngest brother finished college and so it was kind of hard to live at that time with no money for a good education. But my sisters are all very well educated just from grammar school and high school. They did a real good job there and then they'd go to work, just like everybody else. They had to go to work to support their families.

Mr. Zambrano: Yeah, back then it was different. You could actually just graduate from high school and get a fairly good job or at least it seems that way to me.

Mr. Kuryla: Yes, you could get some assembly work or things like that. I know they worked for Kraft Foods Company, at that time, my sisters all worked for them and they had a good job. Some of them worked nights and then they'd get on to the day shift, but they all got jobs. They even did housework and they went out cleaning homes and babysitting and different jobs like that. And nobody was afraid to work. They all went to work and nobody said to you 'owe me this or owe me that'. We didn't even think of that. We just went out and did it and survived the best we can and most of it was paying for your rent and food and clothing for the kids. My dad used to repair our shoes and they did a lot of their own stuff. Everybody just pitched in and worked together.

Mr. Zambrano: It sounds that way. You mentioned earlier that you left high school: how old were you at that point?

Mr. Kuryla: I was just seventeen when I joined the navy. I did go to work a few months. I used to go to the theater, the movies they called them. They'd have this news that was on and they'd show the fleet and all the war ships in a row out there in the ocean and I always looked at that and I said, 'Man, I sure would love to be in the navy'. The only thing I had ever seen was an ore boat go by on Lake Michigan when I was fishing there. That was the biggest ship I've ever seen. They were long ore boats. They hauled the ore for the steel mills and I'd see them go by. I just wanted to join the navy and so when I was seventeen my mother didn't want to sign, so my dad signed for me, and I went into the navy.

Mr. Zambrano: Now before we go any further, I assume that Pearl Harbor happened before you got into the navy?

Mr. Kuryla: Yes. I was home when Pearl Harbor was attacked and I listened to the speech that President Roosevelt made about being attacked and bombed at Pearl Harbor. Of course, nobody knew where Pearl Harbor was. When they said it was in the Hawaiian Islands then you knew where it was. But we just didn't know where Pearl Harbor was. It was funny. Yes, it happened before I went in. Everybody started to go into the service then.

Mr. Zambrano: Do you recall what your general reaction or the reaction around you was?

Mr. Kuryla: Well, everybody was very upset. They all said, 'We've got to do something!' When we saw pictures of it and the newspaper and the radio would start talking about it, we all felt that we had to do something. We just couldn't sit back and let them get away with it. Everybody talked around the neighborhood about this attack. Some people started coming around and there were some Japanese people and they took them away from the neighborhood there.

Mr. Zambrano: Really?

Mr. Kuryla: Yes, we had a few Japanese there that were married to non-Japanese, but they took them. I know in California they were taking them out of there.

Mr. Zambrano: Yes, they sure did. So you enlisted in the navy. Where did they send you first?

Mr. Kuryla: I went out to Great Lakes Naval Training Station.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay, well that's not too far from home then, right?

Mr. Kuryla: No, just it's about fifty miles, something like that. It wasn't that far. We took the elevated train that took us from downtown Chicago after we had our physicals and they took us to Great Lakes and there's a station there and we got off and then they bussed us to these camps.

Mr. Zambrano: What do you remember about basic training?

Mr. Kuryla: Well, I went to this one camp. They were still building a lot of the barracks: the old wooden barracks, two stories. They had two companies, one up above and one down below, and we did a lot of exercise. Of course, they gave us our clothing and everything. We went all through that. They gave us our caps and then they gave us haircuts and when the caps fell down, our ears were holding them up. Then they'd call you and give you five dollars and you got the haircut.. They'd give you the five and then you'd give it back to them. It was a funny thing that they did, but we didn't have any money because they fed us and we had a place to sleep. The navy was good during the Depression. At least when you got into the service you got clothing, a place to sleep and they fed you good and, of course, they had you run and do exercise and get into shape. They did a lot of that and then we learned how to fire some Colt rifles that they had. I guess they were from World War One and then we learned how to use them. There were some cannons they had there and then we went out on a lake with whaleboats and learned how to paddle with the oars. We went through all that training. They taught you to work together as a team and they got you physically fit. We all got to running and we were in good shape. Man,

everything just tightened up on us and no more blubber! Of course, I didn't have any; I was a skinny guy anyway because I was very active before I went in. So I was in pretty good shape and then, of course, I got in better shape and I thought basic training was great! I enjoyed it.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. So where did you go after basic training?

Mr. Kuryla: I went to Camp Shoemaker in California. It was an outgoing camp and they had us there and they would ship you out from there. They took us to San Francisco by bus and when we got there we had our seabags and all. We carried our hammocks around our seabag and it was heavy. We were in such good shape we could lift and carry it. We looked out in the harbor and there were some ships out there and we got into some whaleboats and they took us out into the harbor and that's when I first saw the Indianapolis. It was a beautiful looking ship. We went around her and looked at it. It had a clipper bow on it and I was just looking at it with my mouth wide open and so happy that finally my dream came true. I was going to be on a warship. And then they made a landing and we went aboard.

Mr. Zambrano: What schooling did you have before you went to the Indianapolis? You must have had gunnery school or something like that?

Mr. Kuryla: I didn't have it. I wanted to become either a carpenter or an electricians mate and I passed all that, I could have been a machinist mate also, because I had the experience, but the funny part of it was I guess they wanted a deck force. They were getting the guys out so fast to man these ships that I was just put in the deck force aboard the ship, and that's where I ended up. It

was completely different training than Great Lakes. Of course, the guns they had there and then you look at the guns they had on that ship ... it was so much different! The difference in the weapons that we trained on and what they had onboard the ship ... they had the eight inch guns, they had the five inch, the twenty-five caliber, and they had the forty millimeters and the twenty millimeters ... I got into the Fourth Division, port section in the deck force and that's where I stayed in all the time.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. So what was your rank?

Mr. Kuryla: Well, you're an Apprentice Seaman and then you go up. I got up to Seaman Second Class and then I went up to Seaman First Class and then I studied and I became a Petty Officer, a Coxswain. Then I was going in for the Boatswain's Mate rating. So I was a Coxswain at the time, a Third Class Petty Officer. I was supervising men on the gun crews and I was on all different parts of the gun crew in the magazine. I had a test and put me up in the director, fire control, for a pointer. Our director would direct these five inch guns. We had a gyroscope in there and we had a cross leveler, trainer, pointer, an officer was up in there, the ranger finder, fuse setter. The director controlled all those guns. We could swing over from the starboard or portside and control the five inch guns.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay, then in actions that the Indianapolis would take part in, like the bombardments, I assume that you'd probably see a lot?

Mr. Kuryla: I could see through the scope, yes. I had the firing key and I had a big helmet on with the earphones. I would get the orders to commence firing

and I would close the firing key and I'd say, 'Key closed! Key closed!' I'd squeeze the trigger with my right hand and that would allow the guns on the ships to fire. All they had to do was load them, and then they would fire because I had the firing key. Then, of course, when they would cease fire, I had in my left hand another key that was a beeper that would go 'Beep, beep, beep' and it would tell the gun crew 'Don't load anymore.' I'd keep the firing key closed until all guns would report from gun one to gun eight that the breech is clear, that there are no more shells in there and it was safe to release the firing key. Then I would get the orders to release the firing key and then I would release it. I had a radar scope and an optical scope that I looked through. I had to go to school for that and whenever we'd come into port they always changed the directors. They seemed like they always had new directors that were upgraded. They were better than the others before. A big crane would come on and take that one off and put that other director on. Then we'd have to go to school for maybe a week or two and they'd give us a quick rundown on how to work it. Then we were ready to have a shakedown on those directors. Then we had all these improvements on range and everything else. It would set the fuses quicker. It was much better, but then they would put on and hook that one up, they would say, 'There's another one that's better!' So we'd get that probably when we'd get back into Mare Island and we'd get a new director put on.

Mr. Zambrano: When you joined the Indianapolis, do you recall what year and what month it was?

Mr. Kuryla: It was '43 and the ship was in ten major engagements. I was in eight of them. I missed the first two: Bougainville and the Aleutians. Those two I didn't go on and for the rest of the war I went to all the other battles that the ship went through, eight of them plus delivering the bomb.

Mr. Zambrano: Right. Well, from the west coast, where did the Indianapolis head next?

Mr. Kuryla: The first time?

Mr. Zambrano: Yes, after you first joined it.

Mr. Kuryla: We went to Tarawa. That was our first battle. Actually, I was on the gun crews at that time. I was a pointer on the gun crew on the guns itself and it was the first battle I was in.

Mr. Zambrano: What do you remember about Tarawa?

Mr. Kuryla: Well, I remember that we got there early in the morning. I could see the planes take off the carriers and they bombed. There were beautiful trees and the island looked real nice and I was looking at it and I said, 'Boy, it looks so nice.' Then all of a sudden we start firing the eight inch at it. The eight inch fired first from longer range and then the five inch, when we got closer, we fired them. That whole island ... all those trees were just blasted away. The Marines wanted us to put airbursts into the trees for snipers and so we did that. We made a run along with a destroyer. We went across the whole island firing point blank at it. We were very close to the island then, I remember. It was as close as you can get because you have to watch for the coral. Besides, they know the depth of the water off of these islands. You could only go so far in. It was my first battle. I was wondering ... I was

afraid ... I didn't know what was going to happen, but then when the first shot was fired, you just forgot everything and you just did your job. All the fright ... it just left you. You just completely started doing what you were trained to do and that took your mind off of the unknown, you know? It's amazing how you could change from being frightened to just doing your job.

Mr. Zambrano: Is there anything else that stands out about Tarawa?

Mr. Kuryla: Well, I know the Marines had to go in and they hit the coral. They had to go in with their rifles over their heads and they were really getting knocked down. It was awful. As a matter of fact, there was a dock and some of them got underneath and near that dock. Later on I found out that my brother-in-law was a Marine and he was one of the guys who was on that island and along that dock.

Mr. Zambrano: Really!

Mr. Kuryla: Yeah, Barry, my brother-in-law Barry. He was in the Marine Corps at that time. He was there and I was on the Indianapolis shooting at the island.

Mr. Zambrano: That's quite a coincidence.

Mr. Kuryla: Yes, it was.

Mr. Zambrano: Where did you go after Tarawa?

Mr. Kuryla: After Tarawa? Well, let's see now ... we went to the Carolines, then we went to Eniwetok, Leyte, Iwo Jima, Okinawa, Saipan, Tinian, Guam.

Mr. Zambrano: Do you recall anything about Kwajalein?

Mr. Kuryla: Oh, yes. We were at Kwajalein ... actually, that was an atoll from a volcano. There was a harbor in there, if I recall. Kwajalein was a small battle. There wasn't much there. We bombarded a lot of places and we moved around a lot. We carried Admiral Spruance aboard ship. We were the flagship of the Fifth Fleet, Task Force 58, so we carried the Admiral. We were in that Marianas Turkey Shoot where they shot down all those planes in the Philippine Sea battle.

Mr. Zambrano: I was going to ask you about Admiral Spruance. Did you ever have the occasion of seeing him onboard?

Mr. Kuryla: You know it's so funny that you should ask that. I remember I was on messenger duty on the quarter deck, and I got the message from the officer of the deck. He said, 'Mike, go and take this message to the Admiral. The Captain will be back aboard ship in fifteen minutes'. So I went up forward to officer's country and naturally, you don't tell the Admiral this, you tell the Marine that's standing at the door guarding it. He had all these Marines around him all the time. So this Marine said, 'What is it?' I said, 'I have a message for the Admiral.' He said, 'What is it?' You know, he sounds real rough, the way the Marines talk. And then all of a sudden somebody yells, 'Attention!' and here the Admiral steps out of his room and he turns around and looks and he says to the Marine officer, 'What's going on here?' He said, 'Sir, this is a messenger from the quarter deck. He has a message'. And the Admiral said to me 'What's the message, son?' I said, 'Sir, the skipper will return in fifteen minutes'. He said, 'What? Repeat that!' I said,

'The skipper will return in fifteen minutes'. He said, 'Son, this is not a yacht! This is a cruiser, a heavy cruiser! And he's not the skipper, he's a captain!' Now what is the message!

Mr. Kuryla: I said, 'The Captain will return in fifteen minutes, sir'. He tapped me on the head and he said, 'Thank you very much, son'.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, gosh!

Mr. Kuryla: I'll never forget that! That was the closest that I ever got to Admiral Spruance except on the quarter deck a few times when he went by and we just stood at attention as he went by to get off the ship. But it was a funny thing. That's one thing that sticks to my mind all the time. That's the closest I ever got to Admiral Spruance ... being patted on the head. He was quite an Admiral and a pretty sharp guy. He always walked the foc'sle, the bow. He'd walk up and down. He was always a walker. He did everything like that ... he walked when he got off the ship, he didn't take a jeep. He would walk ... well, they would take him off the dock area in a jeep, but then he'd get out and he'd walk the roads and some of the guys didn't want to be his chauffeur because he made the chauffeur walk with him. They'd say, 'Holy crud! Why am I going to be the chauffeur for the Admiral? He makes you walk! I want to drive!'

Mr. Zambrano: That's funny.

Mr. Kuryla: What's funny is that some of the guys that told me that just laughed! But Captain McVay was a good captain.

Mr. Zambrano: Was he captain when you first boarded the Indianapolis?

Mr. Kuryla:

No, we had Captain Johnson and Captain Vytlačil. Now Captain Johnson, we called him 'GQ' Johnson. He always kept us on our toes. He'd sound general quarters and we'd get to the gun mounts and he'd say, 'Gun one, ready! Gun two, ready! Gun three, ready!' and he's say, 'That's not fast enough! You guys are slow!' But he kept us going. I think that by doing something like that he made us a better crew by getting to battle stations in a hurry. One time we fired our guns so much at this island that when we did come in to Mare Island they took the guns off and they put them on these flatcars, railroad cars. They were going to re-bore them and re-groove them. There were no guns on the five inch mounts. The five inch guns were gone and we were on the dock and there was like a hotdog gedunk there, you know, you got hamburgers and hotdogs and stuff, so we went down to where the workmen were and we'd get a hotdog or something, and all of a sudden general quarters would start ... air defense. And air defense was a bugle call that sends shivers up my spine when I hear it. It's [Mr. Kuryla hums the air defense bugle call]. And boy, I'm telling you when you hear that, you know that its air defense and you know that aircraft are coming at you. That's the worst thing you want to hear because they come in from all angles at you so you really have to put up a barrage to knock down these planes. So we ran up on to the ship when we were at port there and ran over to the guns mounts, but there're no guns and we all call in and the same thing again. He'd say, 'You're too slow!' And he got in close to the islands!

He was good on maneuvering a ship, but everybody called him 'GQ' Johnson. He was quite a captain.

Mr. Zambrano: Was he the captain that would dock the ship without tugs at Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Kurlya: Yes, he would go in, even in San Francisco, he would wave off the tugs. Usually a boat would come by with a helmsman ... what do they call those guys ... I forget now, but they would bring a ship into port. That was their job. But he waved them off and he would bring in the ship himself. I think one time he kind of hit the dock a little bit, but with no damage. He shook everything up. But, yes, he was the one. He would bring in the ship himself with his orders, you know.

Mr. Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Kuryla: He was quite the guy, but he was a good man too. You need a guy like that and he maintained the ship, and did a good job.

Mr. Zambrano: Well, let me just throw out a couple of other island names for you and maybe you can tell me a little bit about each. Do you remember the action at Palau?

Mr. Kuryla: Oh, yes, Bloody Nose Ridge.

Mr. Zambrano: Bloody Nose Ridge?

Mr. Kuryla: Yeah, we fired at the island there and the Marines had a long ways to go in to the island. That was a bloody fight there. Oh, my gosh, they lost a lot of men there for that little island. Sometimes they say it was a mistake that we went in there, but ... yes, it was a tough fight. We got in but you had to be careful too because there was a lot of coral a long ways out. Because there

were these other islands there. This was one of the small ones on the edge of Palau, and the other islands we left them alone. We just lobbed some shells in there every so often. I think it was Babelthaup that was there in the Palau Islands. They were beautiful islands! They came straight up out of the water. There were so many different things there. I went on that island later on when I went in search of the Indianapolis with the Discovery Channel, on the island again.

Mr. Zambrano: Really, you went in search of it?

Mr. Kuryla: Yes, we went there on Palau. We took a tour of the whole island of Palau. Well, actually Paul Murphy and L.D. Cox and Woody James and myself, there were four of us who were the guys who were on that show for the Discovery Channel looking for the Indianapolis. That was the name: *In Search of the USS Indianapolis*.

Mr. Zambrano: You know I think I saw something about that.

Mr. Kuryla: We looked and we were there for about a month, a little over a month and then we went through two typhoons and it was something. We went into the island there. We went into Guam and we had to get out of the typhoon. We were tossing and turning in that. Well, it was a sea going tug that we were on. And they had the ROV that would go down underwater. We were off the Mariana's there, that's the deepest part of the ocean, the Mariana's Trench. Of course, before they called us they went on a search there with sonar and they said that if they hit any targets, any good hits, they would call us and we'd go out there. And they wanted us to sit there and view it on

these TV screens and if we could see battleship gray and distinguish if that's the Indianapolis ... that's what we were there for, to say, 'Oh, that's the Indianapolis!' But we didn't find her. She just didn't want to be found. But we did have a memorial and we dropped a big marker, like a headstone, for the 880 lost and for the others and there was a navy prayer on there, engraved. And then we had a flag that we got at Guam from the battlefield that the admiral gave us and we attached that to the stone and we lowered it into the water at the location, the longitude and latitude, where the ship went down. It was just turning dark and the sky was so pretty and the sun was going down. It got to me.

Mr. Zambrano: Did you feel some sense of closure going through that ceremony?

Mr. Kuryla: Yes I did. As a matter of fact, a lady gave me a rosary and she wanted me to throw it down there, so I did. I had it in my pocket. I was just going to drop it without anybody seeing me do it and this one fellow knew that I had this in my pocket, and they were taping all of this, and he said, 'Mike, what about that rosary?' And I looked at him and I didn't think that he remembered that and he said, 'Aren't you going to do that?' I pulled it out of my pocket and I told him, 'This is for ... ' ; I can't remember her name or her son. I just dropped that rosary. But it was quite touching and I just felt bad that we didn't find it. We were just going to look at it. They were not going to touch it or anything. Just photograph it because actually they figure that maybe 300 of our shipmates are inside of her. And, of course I don't know, somebody said that the bow is off and maybe she split in half, but I

didn't see it going in half and I didn't see the bow, of course. I was aft of the quarter deck where the second torpedo hit. There were six that he fired, he hit us with two. So we sunk in twelve minutes. I just couldn't believe all that had happened that fast and all the things that I'd done ... I was up on the gun mounts and I handed out lifejackets for the guys and put them on lot of the men that were burned and then somebody told me to go down on the boat deck which I was in charge of, to release life rafts, and I went down on the boat deck and I went over to the portside and they were tied to a stanchion and I tried to pull the pins out to release them but they were binding too bad and the ship was really listing to starboard really bad. So I told the guys to get off and I stayed there and I cut them loose. I cut all the lines with my knife and I knew that the rafts would come up as the ship would go down. Then I tried to get off and I couldn't get over to the high side and start sliding down to the low side and there was a piece of line or rope and I grabbed on to that and then as the ship was rolling over to its side, the side of the deck was alongside of me and all of a sudden she just rolled over. Then the deck was above me and everything was falling in the water and I was just hanging on as the ship was going down ...

[End of Side A]

Mr. Zambrano: Okay, we're back on.

Mr. Kuryla: So as she was going down I was hanging on this rope and so I figured, 'Well, what I'll do is I'll inhale all the air I can hold and when she gets out on top of me I'll just kick off the deck and down and then I'll swim to my

left because the superstructure was to my right. So, just as she did that I was up against the deck and I kicked down and I started swimming to the left and all of a sudden it sucked me back against the deck. I kicked down and I did it again. I tried to swim away and she sucked me back down. I'm hanging on there and I couldn't hold my breath any longer. Then the water came into my mouth. You know, they say that your life goes before you and I saw my mother, my father, my six sisters, my brother, at Homer Street where I used to live in Chicago. I saw all that go in front of me and then the water hit me in the nose and I said the Act of Contrition and I asked the Lord to forgive me for all my sins and I blacked out. The next thing you know, I was up on the surface! I don't know how I got up there! I was hanging onto a raft and I turned around and looked and saw the stern of the ship going down and two screws still turning. We had four screws and the other two were down below the waterline already and the guys were still hanging on to the screw guards and down she went and that was it, she is gone. I turned around and in the raft was one of the sailors that I was in charge of. I got in and I threw up everything I had, all that oil and water that I had swallowed. I just kept coughing it up and spitting it out because it really didn't taste so good or didn't feel so good. Then we started hollering because it was midnight ... it was after twelve when we got hit so it was dark and we got some in and the next morning there was more and then there were three more rafts and we all got together and we formed a whole group and put the wounded in the middle of the rafts and we hung around

the outside. We drifted like that. We felt that we were going to be picked up that day, but that day went by and then into the night and then back into the next day and then we thought, 'Oh, nobody's coming.' So somebody said after three days, 'Let's split up. Let's go and look for the shipping lanes.' One north, south, east, and west. I said, 'No, let's stay together. Let's stay together as a larger group. We'll be seen from the air better', but no, they wanted to split up so they did and we all went in our different directions and, of course, the sharks that were around came around and circled us and I guess they were kind of curious to see us in there. We never were trained what to do with sharks, but I did have abandon ship training, but so many of the guys there never did.

Mr. Zambrano: Can you explain how the abandon ship training worked?

Mr. Kuryla: Well, you'd go to a certain area aboard ship that was your section, if you could get to that section with the present damage. But they'd tell you to go to a section and they'd say, 'This is where you're going to get off, you're going to throw these life rafts off, and then you're going to jump into the water.' Then they'd tell you not to have your jacket on, you jump without your jacket on, and then you put your jacket on in the water, because it can push up around the neck. You had to be careful where you landed and they'd tell you to go off the high side. That was another thing in an abandon ship, you'd go off the high side and then you have to get away from the ship because of the suction and they trained us to do that. Of course, then you used to travel with other ships and we'd be picked up and you wouldn't be

in the water that long, but here we were all alone and there were no other ships with us. The Indianapolis was traveling at seventeen knots going on the way to Leyte after we took the bomb to Tinian. We didn't get the destroyer escort that we wanted. They said that they just didn't have any escorts available which I think there wouldn't be any problem in getting one because after a while we found out there were a lot of ships around the different islands that one of them could have come and escorted us. Of course, they didn't tell us that the Underhill, which was a destroyer, got torpedoed on the same route that we were on. So we didn't know about that and they knew about the submarines in the area and they didn't tell our captain that. So anyway, like I said, we stayed out there all that time. We floated around and guys were drinking salt water and I was telling them not to do it and then they would hallucinate and, you know, our lips were getting dry and our tongues were dry like sponges. Near the end before we were picked up you couldn't swallow your saliva because it was all gone. I kept saying, 'Don't drink the water. Don't give up!' I didn't want to give up. I'd say, 'Don't give up!' A lot of the guys gave up. They said, 'They'll never find us!' So they swam off and, of course, the sharks would get them. Anyway, we were like that for five nights and four days in the water. I was way up north so I didn't see the Ventura bomber that spotted the guys in the water: Chuck Gwinn was the pilot. He found us by accident. His trailing antenna on the plane was whipping around so they helped the radioman reel it in when he looked down and he saw this oil slick and thought it was a

submarine and it was us guys in the water, but of course, we were way down on the other end of the chain. We were like stretched out for miles. I was more or less towards where Captain McVay was, in that area, up north. We were from north to south, and all the activity was to the south of us. It was a Ventura out of Peleliu and then they sent a PBY floatplane out and Adrienne Marcs was the pilot of that. He thought that it was just a pilot down but he looked and he saw all these men in the water and then his guys were in the tunnel hatch dropping all their survival gear. They said that, 'The sharks are eating the guys!' Adrienne Marcs said that really shook him and I remember him saying that he had to land. He's not supposed to do that.

Mr. Zambrano: Why? Was it against navy regulations?

Mr. Kuryla: It was against navy regulations and he went down and, I guess from what the guys say, he bounced three times and hit some swells and sprung some rivets, but he finally stayed in one piece and he picked up like fifty-six. But they tied them to the wings and into the plane. Then the Doyle came. It was a destroyer and that's the one that put the searchlight up in the air. That's what we saw at night the following night. We saw the rays coming from the clouds and we figured it was something up ahead and, of course, we were praying and we thought maybe the good Lord was coming to get us, you know. Because all the guys, you know ... if you never had religion, you get it out there!

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, I can see why!

Mr. Kuryla:

But anyway, this happened and the next morning a plane flew over and came down low over us and dropped some dye markers, just to mark us I guess, and kept flying in our direction about two or three times and then so many hours later we saw a mast on the horizon and here it was the USS Register, APD-92. She was a little bigger than a destroyer. She had these landing barges on her instead of regular whaleboats. And she lowered the landing barge and it had a man sitting at the front of the ramp with a rifle in order to shoot the sharks if they were coming. As they were rescuing us they took us onto the landing barge and then onto the ship and put us in bunks that were empty and washed us down getting the oil off of us and gave us a dungarees and a t-shirt and then they started giving us a little bit of a broth and juice just a little bit at a time, and then a little more and a little more. They said that you can't get too much at one time because you can get the cramps so they did that and then they finally picked up some men off of another ship and we headed for the Peleliu. That's where they took us, to the Palau Islands. We were in the hospital there in Peleliu, like overnight. Then the next day they put us in this barge and they took us out to a hospital ship, Tranquility, which was standing off the island there and they put us aboard and then that took us to Guam. When we got to Guam at the harbor and that was August the 6th and that was when they said that they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima.

Mr. Zambrano:

What did you think?

Mr. Kuryla:

Well, we didn't know ... they said that we carried it. Well, we didn't even know what the atomic bomb it was. That's what we carried. Well, we didn't even ask what size it was, what it looked like. Nobody said anything, nobody asked that question. We were happy to be alive and aboard the hospital ship. They took us to Base 18 Naval Hospital over there on Guam and we stayed there until we got well and we were also invited to the submarine rest camp. They fed us and fattened us up a little bit and then we went on the Hollandia, it was a jeep carrier, a small carrier, and that took us to San Diego and from there we went home for thirty days leave. So then I was home for thirty days and then I was at the Naval Armory in Chicago. I reported there and then they shipped me back out to the west coast again for destroyer duty. They wanted me to train recruits from San Diego to Seattle, Washington. At that time all the guys were getting out and they wanted people. I was going to stay in because I was seventeen when I went in and I figured in twenty years I would retire. So anyway, I ended up in the hospital again and when I was in the hospital I told the doctor that I'd go back to duty and he said, 'No way!' He said, 'I'm giving you a medical discharge. You go home and find a girl and get married and raise a family'. So that's what I did. I got home and of course it was a while before I got married because I had to get my head on straight. I had all these problems ... I found out about the Captain being court-martialed. That kind of shook me after going through the experience of sinking of the ship, in the water, and now

the Captain. He was court-martialed while I was in the hospital in California. I didn't know that.

Mr. Zambrano: What year was this that you were discharged?

Mr. Kuryla: '46.

Mr. Zambrano: And what year was the trial?

Mr. Kuryla: I think it was in 1945.

Mr. Zambrano: Did you follow the trial in the paper?

Mr. Kuryla: No, no I didn't. We didn't even know it was in the paper. I didn't even know about it because we had read nothing about the Captain's trial in the paper. I didn't even know it. I wasn't reading any papers. I was in the hospital there and I just had a lot of problems then.

Mr. Zambrano: Did you have any recurring effects from the war?

Mr. Kuryla: Yes. That's what put me in the hospital. They called it combat fatigue.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, okay.

Mr. Kuryla: I didn't know what that meant. I told them bottle fatigue and he said, 'Yes, some of that too!'

Mr. Zambrano: Bottle fatigue?

Mr. Kuryla: Yes, I was drinking a little bit. I was using alcohol as a crutch.

Mr. Zambrano: Well, that was a pretty bad experience.

Mr. Kuryla: Oh, yes, and I finally had to learn to stop that and find myself. It took a long while. I got a good wife and she was military and she understood me. That's why we got along and stayed married this long!

Mr. Zambrano: Well, that's great! Now let me back up a little bit here. I did read up on the Indianapolis and I'd like to get back to Captain McVay, too. That night that the torpedoes hit, I'd read that the visibility was very bad. Is that true?

Mr. Kuryla: Yes, it was. I had just gotten off of watch. I was up in the director, there's one aft and there's one forward. My battle station was forward above the bridge. But anyway, when I got off of watch it was very dark. The moon would come out and then it would go behind the clouds and get dark again. I went down and got a cup of coffee and went topside. It was very dark, yes! And then it would get light again, off and on like a flashlight. You'd be able to see the guys and then it was hard to distinguish them. I guess that submarine must have spotted us when the moon was just right to silhouette us.

Mr. Zambrano: Where were you when the torpedoes hit?

Mr. Kuryla: I was just aft of the quarter deck. I was up top in the hanger deck, up by the five inch gun, by gun number one. I went to sleep on the deck right there because it was too hot. I went to sleep with this Paul Knoll, from Muskegon, Michigan. He and I were petty officers third class together and we just said, 'Let's sleep up here. It's cooler'. So that's where I was, just aft of where the second torpedo hit ... where it hit the powder magazine or the powder bags for the eight inch.

Mr. Zambrano: When you went into the water, how many men were there in your group?

Mr. Kuryla: Well, the next morning was when we got more men. I'd say about forty-five, fifty ... something like that.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. I'm not sure if it was you or Mr. Morgan who said that the rafts in the Discovery Channel special were not accurate. Is that true? In the show they seem to have some netting that was underneath the raft and it looked like you could stand up inside of it.

Mr. Kuryla: Yes, it did. That's the way it looked. That's the way they had it. It had the netting on the sides and the bottom was a basket weave of wood and the sides were like a netting rope, but those to me, I would say, were very accurate as far as the rafts because I used to supply them and tie in the water keg and all that equipment in the raft. They'd have to change the water in there.

Mr. Zambrano: How long were you in the water before these sharks start showing up?

Mr. Kuryla: On the next morning was when we could see them. They'd circle around us.

Mr. Zambrano: I've heard and read that the oil on your bodies somehow worked as a repellent against the sharks at least for a little while?

Mr. Kuryla: I don't know if it was a repellent, but I know it helped with the sun hitting you. Otherwise I don't think that it repelled the sharks. I don't think so.

Mr. Zambrano: You mentioned earlier that some men were drinking salt water. Can you tell me a little more about that?

Mr. Kuryla: Yes, they'd go down and then they'd say that, 'the water's fresh down there and it tastes real good and its cold'.

Mr. Zambrano: They would dive below the surface?

Mr. Kuryla: Yes. They took their jackets off and went down. Some of them would drink it right there. They knotted up their jackets. They had these strings that you

could tie like shoelaces in a bow. They tied knots and of course that wasn't too good because you couldn't get out of your jacket, unless you had a knife to cut those lines loose.

Mr. Zambrano: Those jackets would they get waterlogged after a while?

Mr. Kuryla: Oh, yes, they were only good for ... I think somebody said seventy-two hours, I'm not sure. Yes, they would get waterlogged, but they held out longer than what they figured. Actually, some of the guys were floating by the collars and they called them the swimmers. All they had was their jackets and they were in a group together. I think that Morgan was with the Captain.

Mr. Zambrano: Who?

Mr. Kuryla: Glen Morgan. You mentioned him. I think he was with Captain McVay and his group. He was in a raft. I'm sure he would have noticed that it had the netting on the sides.

Mr. Zambrano: Maybe I misunderstood him. How many men would these rafts hold?

Mr. Kuryla: They're supposed to be a twenty-five man raft. They're pretty big rafts, and they're wet, it's not a dry raft. Some of them were damaged so bad that the ropes were broken and we didn't have any water, first aid kit, nothing! We didn't have anything ... nothing to drink, nothing to eat.

Mr. Zambrano: I suppose that some men lost it out there? Drinking all that saltwater I can only imagine some of the disorientation they must have had.

Mr. Kuryla: Yes, their eyes got like silver dollars and they foamed at the mouth and they would get the shakes and they trembled and they'd get strong. They could

take you down if you tried to stop them from doing something, but then they wouldn't last long. They would last so many hours and then they would die. You know, once I saw that I told the guys 'Don't drink that water!' But they couldn't stop. They didn't have the willpower. You know, I drank enough when I went down with the ship and I wasn't about to. I can't stand the taste of saltwater now! It just brings back memories.

Mr. Zambrano: I understand. How many came out of the water of your group once you were picked up?

Mr. Kuryla: Well, before we split up we had four rafts and after we were alone by ourselves in this one raft and there were five of us left.

Mr. Zambrano: Really, five of you?

Mr. Kuryla: Five. I think there are only two of us alive now that were on that raft together.

Mr. Zambrano: And out of the five were you all five picked up?

Mr. Kuryla: Yes, the five of us were picked up.

Mr. Zambrano: And that was by the Register?

Mr. Kuryla: The Register, yes, APD-92.

Mr. Zambrano: Let me move on to Captain McVay ... well, you know what? I'll let you say whatever you like about the trial? What did you think? What was going through your head when you heard that he was being court-martialed?

Mr. Kuryla: I thought that they used him as a scapegoat. They had to blame somebody because eight-hundred and eighty men died. They wanted to blame somebody. There were so many other mistakes made by other people that I

heard about later on. Even at the trial, from what I heard, Hashimoto even said that it didn't make any difference whether he was zigzagging or not. The same way with three navy submarine commanders that sunk a lot of Japanese tonnage. They said the same thing; that if you zig or zag they will sink you, and they sunk a lot of Japanese ships that were zigzagging!

Mr. Zambrano: Really?

Mr. Kuryla: Yes. So it didn't make any difference.

Mr. Zambrano: When I read that I wondered why any naval vessel would zigzag if it was still capable of being sunk? I assume it must have been a little harder to sink it than if it was going straight?

Mr. Kuryla: I don't know. It was the Captain's prerogative to stop zigzagging and it was at nighttime and he figured that, with the weather the way it was and the moon, he told the bridge to go on a straight course. And they went on a straight course while I was on watch. I was on the eight to twelve watch. That's when the ship all of a sudden quit zigzagging and it went on a straight course.

Mr. Zambrano: How many knots was she doing at that point?

Mr. Kuryla: We were going at least seventeen maybe a little less, because we were on our way to Leyte to meet up with the Idaho, the battleship, for gunnery practice, and then get ready for the invasion of Japan from Okinawa.

Mr. Zambrano: As the ship was sinking do you know of any distress calls that were sent out?

Mr. Kuryla: Not that I know of myself, but I did find out later on by one of the radiomen that lives here in Lake Forrest, Illinois, that he was at radio shack when they were sending out an S.O.S. and he said an S.O.S. did go out and we did find out later on, years later, some of the guys that came to our reunion said that they knew there was an S.O.S. There were some goof ups and a lot of people just ignored some of it.

Mr. Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Kuryla: When Hashimoto sunk us, he radioed in that he sunk a ship, a battleship, and they heard that, but they never went out to investigate.

Mr. Zambrano: Yes, actually I'd read that too. It seemed that there were a lot of indicators that something was going on out there. I was also really surprised that there was no destroyer escort along with the cruiser.

Mr. Kuryla: That's what we were supposed to have, but they said there were none available, but there sure were a lot of them when they came to our rescue. They came from all over. They were off on different islands doing nothing but patrolling. They could have come to escort us to the Philippines.

Mr. Zambrano: I understand that Captain McVay attended some of the early reunions?

Mr. Kuryla: He was there in 1960.

Mr. Zambrano: Did you get a chance to speak to him?

Mr. Kuryla: Yes. We picked him up at the airport. We saluted him as he came down. At that time they used to come down a latter right off the plane. They didn't go through the airport like they do now. He came down that ladder and we were on both sides and we gave him a salute and he was real happy.

Mr. Zambrano: It sounds like he had the respect of his crew.

Mr. Kuryla: He sure did. There was nobody that was against him, nobody! We were all upset. For years we tried to get him exonerated and finally we did.

Mr. Zambrano: And that was in '99?

Mr. Kuryla: No, in 2000 he was exonerated ... well, just about, yeah. Around 2001, right about there.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. Let me back up a little bit. We skipped a part there: the Indianapolis returned to Mare Island after Okinawa?

Mr. Kuryla: Yes, after we got hit by a suicide.

Mr. Zambrano: So it was a suicide then?

Mr. Kuryla: We got hit by a kamikaze. It killed nine and wounded twenty-six.

Mr. Zambrano: I heard something about dropping a torpedo or bomb through the deck?

Mr. Kuryla: It was an armor piercing bomb that went through the decks and exploded down below. It ripped all the decks up, but we were watertight. We had all the doors locked ... bolted down the hatches, I should say. So we went back to Kerama Retta and they put a cement patch on us and from there we went on our own power all the way back to Mare Island, California.

Mr. Zambrano: And in California after being repaired, that's when you're sent with the components of the atomic bomb back to Tinian. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Mr. Kuryla: Actually, we picked up the atomic bomb at Hunter's Point in San Francisco.

Mr. Zambrano: Really! I only say it like that because I'm a San Francisco native. I know where Hunter's Point is.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. I'm just going to back up a little bit more here. You mentioned earlier the Battle of the Philippine Sea, the Marianas Turkey Shoot. Do you recall very much about that action?

Mr. Kuryla: Yes. A lot of aircraft were shot down.

Mr. Zambrano: Do you remember who the admiral was in your task group?

Mr. Kuryla: For that one ... it was Spruance.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. I had read that Admiral Clark had taken a section of the task force to bombard and attack Okinawa to keep Japanese aircraft from coming down to the Philippine Sea. I only mention it because I read that the Indianapolis was part of that group. Do you remember anything about that?

Mr. Kuryla: Admiral Clark?

Mr. Zambrano: I guess his nickname was 'Jocko' Clark.

Mr. Kuryla: Jocko Clark. I don't remember any of that.

Mr. Zambrano: Is there anything else that comes to mind about the Battle of the Philippine Sea?

Mr. Kuryla: Well, I know we tried to get the Japanese fleet and they had all their aircraft up. Our carriers sent out a lot of aircraft. They thought they would bomb us at the island there and then come and refuel on another island ... I can't think of the name now ... and then Admiral Spruance got in between and caught them off guard as they were coming. Those planes were all shot down. They said the carriers went back to Japan without too much aircraft on, because they shot so many of those planes down.

Mr. Zambrano: Now let me ask you a few things that are really basic. I just want to get into what you experienced just as an individual on more typical days. First off, what was your standard uniform for the day?

Mr. Kuryla: Aboard ship it was dungarees and a shirt, but our caps weren't white, they were dyed blue. We didn't want to have white caps on especially at night. That'd why we dyed all our sailor caps.

Mr. Zambrano: What about navy meals? What did you think about the food that the navy would serve you?

Mr. Kuryla: Very good food. We had good food. Can't complain about that! The navy fed you well.

Mr. Zambrano: Did you make any close friends in your division?

Mr. Kuryla: Oh, yes, I made a lot of good friends. Bob McGuiggan was one of my good friends. He just passed away a year ago last August. And he died from the heat here in Chicago. He couldn't remember a lot of things and I guess he didn't turn the switch on to get the air conditioner going and he had a bad heart and the heat got him, he died. But I made good friends with him. We stood up to each others weddings and we were godparents to each others children. We always went out together. We used to charbroil a lot together. There were many others too, but Bob was the closest, Bob McGuiggan.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. Anyone else come to mind?

Mr. Kuryla: Well, there was Paul Knoll, there was Dan Spencer, Ed Brown, Louie DeBernardi ... oh, there were so many of them. Of course, around here

there's Sospizio, he lives around here in the south suburbs of Chicago.

Anyway, there's a lot of good friends. We're losing a lot of them too.

Mr. Zambrano: I understand. I'm sorry. What kind of recollections do you have as far as when the Indianapolis wasn't in some kind of major action? How would you pass the time?

Mr. Kuryla: We would maintain the ship. We'd get the guys chipping paint ... that was a normal thing; chipping paint. We'd be mopping the decks, getting stuff clean. We would train on the gun mounts on some guns that were dummy guns. We would practice loading our loading, putting the guys to work. We'd see how fast they were and we'd time them and everything else. Everyday we'd exercise and do many things. We had a lot of entertainment. We had movies on the quarter deck and we had our own guys in a band. Some of the guys were pretty talented as comedians and actors, you know. We would operate a gedunk which had ice cream and candy bars and things like that, you know.

Mr. Zambrano: I believe somebody told me that the ship had an ice cream machine?

Mr. Kuryla: Yes. We made our own ice cream. We'd give it to the destroyers when they brought us the mail and film. They'd want the ice cream first, so we'd have to run the ice cream over to them and then they'd check to make sure it was ice cream and then they would send the film and the mail.

Mr. Zambrano: So how often would you get mail?

Mr. Kuryla: Not too often, because we would be out to sea a lot. Every so often we'd get mail, but it was pretty good for the times that it was and where we were.

Way out at sea it kind of hard to get mail. When you're by the destroyer they'd shoot a line across to you and that's how they got the mail across.

Mr. Zambrano: So, they would shoot a line across and they would send it over?

Mr. Kuryla: We would fire these lines and we'd reel them in and then we'd give them a bigger rope and then on this rope you have pulleys and these pulleys would help carry the ice cream across in a covered container to keep it cold and then they would put the mail and film back on that line and then we'd release it. So that's what we did a lot of times.

Mr. Zambrano: Do you remember who your immediate supervisor was?

Mr. Kuryla: My immediate supervisor was Louie DeBernardi; he was our first class boatswain's mate. Anderson was another boatswain's mate, too. ... they were both chief's. Without chiefs there wouldn't be a navy. They made the navy.

Mr. Zambrano: What rank were you when we got out?

Mr. Kuryla: I was a third class petty officer. I was striking for boatswains mate, but of course the ship went down and I got out of the navy.

Mr. Zambrano: So you were just a third class petty officer? I mean, sometimes there are ranks like yeoman first class or machinist mate second class ... what were you?

Mr. Kuryla: This was a coxswain. They lowered the rank of a boatswains mate. It's a cross anchor rate and it's a deck force rate, and my next step would be a boatswain's mate. So I was below a boatswains mate, but I do the same work. I was with the boats and the boat davits and splicing the lines and all

that. Putting the guys to work ... supervising. We'd be in working parties, maintaining the ship. I was in charge of the boat deck and then I'd be in charge of something else. Every so many months you would switch over to different parts of the ship and take care of them. So I was in charge of the boat deck when the ship sunk. I was in the Fourth Division, Fourth Section.

Mr. Zambrano: Well, let me just switch this tape out really quick.

[Tape stop]

Mr. Zambrano: What do you remember about the weather in the Pacific?

Mr. Kuryla: Well, the weather was pretty nice. Sometimes you'd get some rough weather like typhoons. We were in a typhoon after Spruance took off and Halsey took over the fleet. Then you'd become the 7th Fleet. They just changed the name because there was a different admiral in charge. So we ran into some typhoons and we ran into rain storms. Sometimes it was calm and the water was just like glass. Different weather, you know. All of a sudden you'd go through some rain squalls and then you'd be out of them and in the sunlight again and then you'd dry off real fast. It was hot. Of course, you sweated and you perspired. Like I said, your clothes would be soaking wet sometimes. You kind of got used to it, you know. You're young enough, a lot of us guys were. Let's see ... I was nineteen years old when the ship went down. In September I'd be twenty, so this was in July.

Mr. Zambrano: So you weren't even twenty-one years old when she went down.

Mr. Kuryla: No, I was still nineteen. I was going to be twenty in September. She went down in July and then on August the 3rd I got picked up and then the next

month was September and my birthday and I'd be twenty. I was nineteen years old. A lot of the guys were around nineteen years old ... some who were younger. Some were just there fourteen days at sea. We had a twenty-five percent change of personnel. We had a lot of new fellows aboard.

Mr. Zambrano: I'm just looking at my questions here ... you answered a lot of my questions as we went along. Is there anything else that you'd like to add? Any experiences that are humorous, serious ... anything that you'd like to add to the interview that I might have not touched on?

Mr. Kuryla: Oh, yes. When they put the crate aboard ship and we were on our way from San Francisco ... when we left the United States, the Captain got on the PA system and he said, "You're wondering what we have aboard ship once we put that crate aboard". He said, "What we have is something that will help shorten the war" and that's all he said, so we were all wondering what the heck was in that crate that will help shorten the war. And one of the guys said, "I know what it is!" and we said, "What?" He says, "Toilet paper for General MacArthur!"

Mr. Zambrano: Now that is humorous!

Mr. Kuryla: That's one of the funny parts and another one was when I was in the water guys were throwing there money away. I was picking it up.

Mr. Zambrano: You were picking it up?

Mr. Kuryla: Yes. I had my wallet in the water and all the bills were soaked with oil and water, you know, it was stained. It didn't even look like our money. And I put it in my wallet and the guys said, "What're you going to do with that,

Mike?” and I said, “When I get picked up I’m going to do two things. I’m going to go to church and pray for you guys and myself, and then I’m going to the tavern and get drunk!” And that’s what I did. I did take that money and a lot of people were wondering why and I just told them, “I’m going to make it!” And then they said, “No” they’re not going to make it and they were throwing their money away. It’s kind of funny and then sad too, but that’s what happened. That was one of my experiences. But like I said, we did a lot of praying and that really helped us, you know.

Mr. Zambrano: Gosh, well I think that covers quite a bit. I’ll just ask you again, is there anything that you’d like to add ... anything else?

Mr. Kuryla: It was a very emotional thing for me when I first got home. When I got back to Chicago, after the sinking, I came home for thirty days leave. I came home ... I don’t know if you know what street cars are?

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, yes. I’m familiar with them.

Mr. Kuryla: In Chicago they had a bunch of street cars and I came in at Union Station and I got on a street car and I was going to pay and the conductor said, “You don’t pay. Service people don’t pay anything. We take them free.” So I said, “Great!” I went all the way home in the streetcar, got off not too far from where we lived and walked down about half a block with my gear and I got to the back door and I knocked on the door and my mother opened the door and ... it was one of the happiest moments of my life and I know for her too, but we both really broke down. Everybody was married, but I was single and, of course, seeing the rest of the family that was a happy and a

sad part too for me, but a very, very, very happy time too. For my mother especially, to have her son back home.

Mr. Zambrano: I can only imagine. I have two children of my own. You weren't called up for the Korean War, were you?

Mr. Kuryla: No, I wasn't. I got a medical discharge.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Kuryla: I couldn't go into the service which I wanted to stay in but with my problems ... well, anyway ...

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. Well, I think that pretty much covers everything, sir.

Mr. Kuryla: Okay.

Mr. Zambrano: Well, on behalf of the Museum and myself, I just want to thank you for making the time to talk with me today.

Mr. Kuryla: Well, thank you very much.

Mr. Zambrano: If you could just hold on one second right after I click the tape off. There are just a couple of things that I want to mention, okay.

Mr. Kuryla: Okay.

Transcribed by:

Mike Zambrano, Jr.

Panama City, Panama, Central America

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