

**Mary Confalone nee Cosada  
Veteran**

**Interviewed on June 26, 2002  
Interviewed at Shaker High School  
Latham, New York**

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**Q:** Mary, I understand you were brought up in the Bronx (NY) until you were about eleven years old?

**MC:** Yes.

**Q:** Where did you move to after that?

**MC:** To Yonkers (NY)

**Q:** What was your maiden name?

**MC:** Mary Cosada (00:49 confirm spelling)

**Q:** Cosada...cosada means "the cream" cream of southern Italy, correct?

**MC:** That's right, the "cream of the crop" (laughs)

**Q:** Where about did you move when you moved to Yonkers and what year was that?

**MC:** To McLean Avenue about 1938.

**Q:** So, before the war started?

**MC:** Yes, before the war.

**Q:** I bet Yonkers was quite rural in those years. Did they still have the trolley cars back then?

**MC:** Yes, it was very rural. We had trolley cars on Yonkers Avenue. But we had club transportation that went to White Plains, (NY) Don't you remember club transportation? (both laugh)

**Q:** Sorry about that, I should have realized it was a very up and coming town at that time. Where did you move after that?

**MC:** From McLean, then to Cox Avenue, then to Kimball Avenue.

**Q:** How old were you when the war started on December 7, 1941?

**MC:** I was just sixteen.

**Q:** Do you remember where you were when you heard the news?

**MC:** Yes, we were in the car, driving down Grand Concourse to a wedding in Manhattan (NY).

**Q:** The Triborough Bridge was built then?

**MC:** We took the Third Avenue Bridge.

**Q:** Do you remember what time of day it was?

**MC:** About two o'clock. We heard that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. We went down to the wedding, a young fellow we knew was getting married. All the young people were talking about the probability of being drafted into the service.

**Q:** Those must have been very hectic years with the communications being as slow as they were compared to today. How soon after you heard the news did you see any photographs of what transpired?

**MC:** I don't recall, but when we moved to our house we did get rid of a lot of old clutter and the newspapers we had accumulated at that time.

**Q:** I bet you are sorry now that you did that.

**MC:** My kids are sorry because they said I threw out all their baseball cards! They were worth so much they could have put a down payment on a house! But you can't keep everything!

**Q:** So, you said you were sixteen when you heard the news, how did you contribute to the war effort?

**MC:** Well, I graduated from high school in June of 1942. I couldn't go into nursing because I was too young. They didn't take you until you were eighteen. So I went to work at New York Hospital as a messenger. I took records to court. Then I got a job in the Accounting Department. When I turned eighteen, I went into nursing in March of 1944.

**Q:** Did you join the Army?

**MC:** No, I joined the United States Cadet Nurse Corps (CNC)

**Q:** How many years did you have to serve before you completed your nursing tour?

**MC:** Since they paid for your education, you had to stay at least six months to a year after you finished your education. I was finished in 1947, I had to stay a little longer. The war was over by then.

**Q:** Did any of the boys who came home go through your hospital?

**MC:** No, it was a city hospital. I worked at Bellevue Hospital.

**Q:** Is that a picture of you? Can you hold it up please. How old were you there?

**MC:** Yes, that is me in my Cadet uniform. I was about eighteen or nineteen.

(Mary holds up a black and white 8 x 10 photo of herself in uniform.)

**Q:** Very nice. You realize that I have already interviewed your husband. When did you meet your husband?

**MC:** After the war. We were young. He was in one place and I was somewhere else. We did not meet until 1947 or 1948.

**Q:** Before we get more into that topic, tell me a little about what you were feeling during your years in the Cadet Corps.

**MC:** I don't recall too much, but I do remember D-Day because I woke up my fellow classmates, I knocked on their doors. I told them "Rise and Shine, it's time to get up" and I also told them "it was D-Day!". So everybody was excited then.

**Q:** Did you know any of the boys that took part in the invasion on D-Day?

**MC:** No, but a girl I went to high school with, her boyfriend was at Hickam Field on Pearl Harbor Day. He did survive and came home. But it was a few days before they got word that he was okay.

**Q:** Since you were down in Manhattan at the time D-Day occurred, what was the consensus of the crowds? Were there any crowds out in the streets and lots of newspaper stories?

**MC:** Newspapers were around, but I don't recall crowds since I worked different shifts and you really weren't outside much. But when the war was over, on that day we got off. I was working the operating room and they closed the operating room and gave people extra days off. That was the day we went up to Fifth Avenue in Times Square and everybody was very, very excited and happy. They were kissing and talking to one another. There were papers all over the street, you were walking in ankle-deep papers. That was V-J Day.

**Q:** What happened on V-E Day?

**MC:** I don't recall, it was probably very quiet. Just another day. D-Day was exciting because of the invasion and things were getting started.

**Q:** Well, you and I both know what D-Day was, can you explain to your decedents what D-Day was?

**MC:** That was the Normandy Invasion. June 6, 1944. That was when our biggest armada invaded the coast of Normandy, France. Bill and I took a trip to Normandy two summers ago. We went with the ABA to London, and we took a trip over to Paris and went to Normandy.

**Q:** Oh, but Bill wasn't in that theater was he?

**MC:** No, but we were there and wanted to visit the Normandy beaches, where the Rangers went ad hoc (responding to unpredictable situations by joining different units). We lost a lot of people there.

We took a tour and visited the cemetery and museum. It was a fourteen hour tour that began at seven in the morning and came back at eleven at night. It was a long day

**Q:** What was V-E Day?

**MC:** That was when the war ended in Europe. May 8, 1945.

**Q:** Do you remember the transmission when President Franklin Roosevelt died?

**MC:** No, because I had gone to the movies that day! When I came out, we saw the headlines and people were talking about it. They had not made any announcement while the movie was going on.

When we came out we found out, and everybody was very sad. Everybody back at the residence was talking about it and what they thought was going to happen next.

**Q:** Where did you go to the movies, in Times Square? Did you see the headlines in the newspaper?

**MC:** No, it was probably a local theater on 23<sup>rd</sup> Street. The local papers weren't out yet, but everyone was talking about it because you heard it on the radio. We did not have television then! (both laugh)

**Q:** So, we know what D-Day and V-E Day are. What is V-J Day?

**MC:** V-J Day was when the Japanese surrendered. The war came to a crushing end.

**Q:** I bet that was when the celebrations really went wild.

**MC:** That was when the people went wild in Times Square and Fifth Avenue. Newspapers covered the ground all over the place. Everybody was happy, singing, running up and down. It was a lot of fun.

**Q:** Remember that famous picture of the sailor kissing the nurse, was that Bill and you?!

**MC:** (Laughing) No, there was no Bill then. He wasn't back from the service yet.

**Q:** After the war ended, and you got out of nursing and finished school in 1947, did they still require you to serve the time in the service?

**MC:** I stayed. Some of the girls in my class, in the last six months of service before we graduated went to VA hospitals. One went to Topeka, Kansas to the Menninger Clinic, others became visiting nurses. They came back for graduation. I stayed at the hospital until I finished my service.

**Q:** When did you meet your husband?

**MC:** Not until about 1948. My mother and father and I went to Europe in 1947. He had never been back and his father had died during the war.

**Q:** Your father was a native of Italy?

**MC:** Yes, and my mother was too. But she came to America when she was a year old, she celebrated her first birthday on the boat ride.

**Q:** What was it like to travel in 1947, it had to be interesting.

**MC:** It was interesting, you did not have private cabins on the boat, you had like dorms. Sometimes there were ten beds in a room. It was fine, it was very nice. We arrived in Naples, Italy and then you had to arrange for your transportation back. You had to go to the American Embassy and confirm which date you would come back. The interesting thing about that was there was a fascist leader, I've forgotten his name, but he was shot in Rome.

**Q:** It wasn't Mussolini?

**MC:** No, this man was a Communist leader. I had been walking around in Naples with my aunt and then went back to our hotel for lunch. She had a Godson who was in the police force who told us we had better stay at the hotel. But my father and I said, no and we went back to the consulate to see about getting this letter in order to book our transportation back to America. While we were waiting for a bus, all of a sudden all these big, open trucks came down the street and a lot of men came out of these trucks. A detective was with us and grabbed my father and I by the hand and said "Let's Go!". He hailed a hansom cab, the kind with a horse, and took us back to our hotel. He said "stay in that hotel and don't you dare come out."

**Q:** What was going on?

**MC:** Well, there were uprisings and it was called a General Strike and they stopped all transportation because of this assassination.

**Q:** For how long?

**MC:** It was for a couple of days, we could not go anywhere. Finally, they said we could travel again we were going to visit my Aunt who lived near Rome. We went to the bus station, like our Greyhound service, and got on a bus to visit my Aunt.

**Q:** Could you see the war ravaging of the towns that were south of Rome?

**MC:** You could see that a lot of the train stations had been bombed and they were being rebuilt. We did travel up and down quite a bit, but we didn't see much other than that. The war had been over in Europe by two or three years by that time.

**Q:** So the rebuilding of Europe was taking place?

**MC:** Yes.

**Q:** This was about the time the Berlin Airlift was happening.

**MC:** I don't recall, we were home when the Berlin Airlift was going on. But we did do a lot of traveling from Rome, Milan, Turin, Lake Como, Perugia, Florence and all the way South down to Bari visiting different people that we knew.

**Q:** Had the economy of Italy come back in that relatively short period of time, or was there still a lot of starvation?

**MC:** We did not see any starvation because a lot of things were going on. We were with a lot of young people. We visited a lot of open-air cafes with bands and dancing so it was a very happy time. I met a lot of nice, happy people. My Godfather's brother lived in Perugia and we had to bring him something and he insisted we stay with him. One of his older children was going to be an engineer, his daughter was going to be a school teacher, one son was a pharmacist and another was going to be a doctor. They were about my age, very nice and very happy people. One of the sons took me to his university to meet friends who were happy and having parties. So my experience was a good one.

**Q:** So the war really did not affect the farm life or farmers' economy?

**MC:** Well, these are not farmers, these were city people.

**Q:** I meant the support of the farms providing food.

**MC:** I don't recall anything about not having enough to eat. We went to my father's home town and stayed at the priest's house. One time we had pigeons, or some small bird to eat, on a Friday and the only thing they always said was it didn't matter if it was a Friday or not you don't have to eat fish. If you had money and got something good, you ate it that day. It didn't matter what day of the week it was.

**Q:** So you did not leave Italy?

**MC:** Right, we took the express train and went around visiting relatives which was very nice from Bari, all the way up to Milan. It took a few hours, but it wasn't a night train, it did not have compartments. It was a very nice train.

**Q:** All the rail services had been completely restored?

**MC:** It was the stations themselves that were being rebuilt, the tracks were fine.

**Q:** You know Mary, there was one point in our conversation about your trip over on the boat that I would like to explore a little bit. Because when we look at the cruise ships today and how

plush they are....

**MC:** There was nothing like that (laughter).. You had a good meal and all, but it was like dormitory life. There were big, long tables and you ate cafeteria-style. It was nothing like a cruise ship! There were no little rooms for activities or entertainment, we did not have anything like that. People entertained themselves.

**Q:** So the toilets were like the kind on a troop ship? Were they individualized?

**MC:** I don't remember, see that did not make an impression on me! (laughs) But I'm sure they were like if you could find in a store now. Something like that.

**Q:** And the shower facilities? Were they private or in your room?

**MC:** I guess they had about three or four stalls, whatever it was, it was. I guess like a troop ship would have been because you did not have individual rooms.

**Q:** Have you taken a cruise lately?

**MC:** No, William does not like cruises.

**Q:** So it is hard for you to make the comparison.

**MC:** We did take a cruise, quite a few years back. But it wasn't anything like these big cruise ships today, like the Princess Line. We went with some people from FAA to Nassau. It was a plain, little cruise. We had a private state room with your own little bathroom.

**Q:** Okay, that's enough about that. Your accommodations were far superior to what you had on the boat ride during the war. Was there any difference in the food?

**MC:** Oh yes. We ate continuously! (laughs)

**Q:** Mary, now that you finished your Italian cruise, was that now 1948?

**MC:** We were gone for three months July to September. I believe that was 1947.

**Q:** So you then went to the American Consulate?

**MC:** Yes, so we could book our passage home. You had to have a letter.

**Q:** How long did it take you to get back to New York, did you go straight back to New York? Did you have any problems with customs coming through?

**MC:** About five or seven days at the time. It was a long trip. We came back into New York. There were no problems, everything was fine.

**Q:** Where you came back into New York, does it still look basically the same or has it changed much?

**MC:** I think the piers have improved. (laughs) They have building and rebuilding them, so they did look nicer now than when we came back.

**Q:** Did someone pick you up?

**MC:** I'm sure someone did, we had trunks so we had those shipped back to the house.

**Q:** In 1948 you said you met your present husband, Bill Confalone?

**MC:** Yes, when we came back from Europe so it had to have been 1948. My Godfather's daughter knew his sister so we met that way.

**Q:** Did she arrange a blind date?

**MC:** No, no she came to our house for dinner, they did not live that far away from where we lived, and she asked if we could go and see her friend, Dottie (23:32 spelling?) so we said “sure” and my father drove us over.

**Q:** And there he was!?

**MC:** No, he was out on a supposedly date. It was a rainy day and he had gone to the beach. So I don’t know where he was, but when he came back, we met then. After his little excursion to “the beach” in quotes.(laughs)

**Q:** So you exchanged a “Hello, how are you”?

**MC:** Yeah, a “Hello, how are you” or whatever and that was it. He later called, we saw each other on and off and it wasn’t anything serious. Then we didn’t see each other, then we got together and started going steady.

**Q:** I’ve heard that term before, tell this generation what’s “going steady” means. (laughs)

**MC:** Going steady means when you are only seeing or dating one person.

**Q:** How long did you quote/unquote go steady?

**MC:** About two years before we got married. We got married in 1951.

**Q:** As you are aware, I interviewed your husband on this project.

**MC:** And what did he say?

**Q:** Well, I did not get into his love life. We just discussed the war years.

**MC:** Oh, okay..(laughs)

**Q:** He has had quite a few interesting scenarios during the war.

**MC:** Yes, yes.

**Q:** Has he ever mentioned any of these to you?

**MC:** No, not really. But he did talk about the typhoons and how bad it was going through the typhoons. When we took a trip to California we visited Coronado Beach where he had trained. We asked for and received permission to go on the base on Coronado Island. He was looking for his training place. Even when we had gone to Hawaii he also looked for the place where he was dropped off and had to dig a hole and set up his equipment. Bill was a radioman. They timed you, and then you came back. We were talking to the young fellows on base, but they did not even know the kind of ship he was on. They did not recognize it at all. He pointed over and said, “See that land over there, I think maybe that was where we trained. “The man said, “oh, that is our golf course.” (laughs)

**Q:** Coronado Island is a very beautiful island today. I bet it looks a little bit different from when he was there.

**MC:** Yes, because he didn’t remember all these things. The big hotel, the Del Coronado, was there when he was there. And he did recognize some of the nice houses. It was a fun trip.

**Q:** Did you get engaged after your two years of dating?

**MC:** We were only engaged six months, and then we got married.

**Q:** What year was that?

**MC:** 1951

**Q:** That was when Korea was going on? They did not try to get him back into service did they?

**MC:** Right, Korea was happening. Bill just mentioned the other day when we were talking to someone. He had stayed in the Naval Reserves for a while and then decided he was going to get out. It was lucky he got out because he would have gotten called up. His cousin was in the Reserves and he was called to go to Korea.

**Q:** So you've lived in Westchester, NY for a long time and have seen the big growth in Westchester County since World War Two to today. Can you elaborate on that?

**MC:** Well, when I went to high school and took that club transportation bus up to Roosevelt High School there was nothing along Central Avenue. Hillview Reservoir was there, Yonkers Racetrack and across the street was a diner on the corner. In fact, the boy whose father owned that diner was in my graduating class. Except he got killed riding his bicycle one month before graduation.

**Q:** So from the corner of Yonkers Avenue all the way to White Plains was...

**MC:** It was desolate. There was a golf course near Roosevelt, otherwise all you saw were trees. I do remember there were some garden apartments when we went to school because somebody from our class did live in there. Other than that you could not see anything and you could go all the way up to White Plains.

**Q:** No shopping centers or gas stations?

**MC:** Very few gas stations (laughs). There wasn't even anything on Tuckahoe Road then. When we moved to where I live now, they were just starting to build the Thruway. It hadn't gotten up to where we were yet. There was a very nice restaurant that we went to in 1955 which isn't there anymore. Very little back then, except for Grandma's Pies and Restaurant. And all of a sudden now you have a little shopping center here, a little shopping center around the corner. A lot of things are now on Tuckahoe Road.

**Q:** I remember in the early 1950's on Mountaindale Road they built that big subdivision where all the Veterans moved with their young families.

**MC:** Yes, my cousin had gotten married and bought one of the houses on Mountaindale Road. He was in the Air Force.

**Q:** So the great growth period in Yonkers was about when?

**MC:** It was in the 50's, after the war. On McLane Avenue, going up towards Central Avenue, there were Quonset Huts where the returning Veterans lived. Did you forget about that?

**Q:** Yeah, I did forget about that.

**MC:** They had to live in the Quonset Huts and then began to build Levittown because so many of the guys went down to live there.

**Q:** They say what made the economy great was the GI Bill. Did that have any effect on your life?



**MC:** Well it helped us because it got Bill through college. It paid for part of the cost, and we had to pay the rest, but at least part of it was taken care of by the GI Bill.

**Q:** What kind of degree did your husband obtain?

**MC:** He went to CCNY (City College of New York), he couldn't get in until February of 1952, the year after we were married. He was missing one credit for a public speaking course so he could not get in that September of 1951. Then he went to law school in 1952.

**Q:** What do you feel your life would have been like without that GI Bill?

**MC:** It would have been very hard for him to afford to go to college. When I tell our kids that he made three thousand dollars a year, and I made two or three thousand a year, they laugh at you because they expect such big salaries today. But that was what you had to live on at that point. You did not make the money you have today. Of course, then I could go to the butcher and get meat for a week for ten dollars for the two of us. Today one piece of meat can cost ten dollars or even more than that!

So it would have been very difficult with the GI Bill.

**Q:** So when did Bill graduate as an attorney?

**MC:** In 1955.

**Q:** Is that when he started his practice?

**MC:** No he worked for the government, and he did have a private practice on the side. He kept that job which was very good.

**Q:** After World War II, did many of the Veterans take advantage of the GI Bill do you know?

**MC:** I think so, I think that is how a lot of them got their houses. They went to Levittown and built that community out there. They saved their money and that is how they got there.

**Q:** So in your lifetime, you didn't see the growth in the early years before the war that you have seen after the effects of the GI Bill.

**MC:** Right, when everybody started building when they came back and needed a place to live, then you started to see everything grow.

**Q:** Mary, we've taken you into 1955 when Bill got out of law school. Let's go back to discuss World War Two. When the war ended, everybody was very happy. How were the Veterans received when they came back?

**MC:** They were received very well. Everybody was very happy to see them come back. There was flag raising and parades. Everybody was whooping it all up for them.

**Q:** Was that what it was like after the Korean War in 1950 to 1953?

**MC:** No. Nothing for the Korean or the Vietnam Veterans. It was sort of like they were forgotten guys. They did nothing for them. They did not get any of the benefits that the World War Two Veterans got. I think that is what they are arguing for and fighting about right now. Don't they want the same rights now that the others got?

**Q:** It's a little bit different with the Persian Gulf Veterans?

**MC:** The Persian Gulf War did not last very long. Everybody was happy about that. It seemed more related to WWII. But those other two wars, there was a lot of dissension. People argued

about them.

**Q:** You've experienced this country getting slapped twice. Once with the Pearl Harbor attack and just recently with 9/11 and the World Trade Center attacks. Give me your feelings about that in comparison with Pearl Harbor.

**MC:** I think they both brought the country together a lot. Everybody talked about it and wanted to do something. It was the same thing with World War Two when Pearl Harbor was attacked. Everybody wanted to get on the band wagon. Like with 911, get on the bandwagon. We have to do this, we have to do that, we can't let this happen again and all that. Whereas the other two wars, you didn't hear anything like that. These two we were hit at home.

**Q:** I was too young to remember Pearl Harbor. Tell me what was the difference you saw between the attack of the ships versus the attack of innocent civilians?

**MC:** That point was a little bit of a difference because we lost a lot of men at Pearl Harbor. Everybody from all over the country had someone there. In 911, mostly people who worked and lived in New York were hit. The people who came to our rally felt bad for us. It was different with Pearl Harbor. The Keiser Shipyards were building almost one ship a day. There was the "Rosie the Riveter" character, everybody pulled together. That was a big thing that effected everyone in the country.

911 did effect the country, but really it was because they felt so bad about it, but it was New York really that had its buildings demolished and lost so many of its people.

**Q:** Was the outrage the same even though it was military versus civilians?

**MC:** I think so. The outrage was very great this time and it was then too. Those were two very bad days.

**Q:** Well Mary, if you had an opportunity to say something to your decedents, which you are going to say right now regarding war, what would you say to them?

**38:01 MC:** It's a bad time, a bad place. I really don't know. I would hope they wouldn't have to go through it. It's not nice (Mary gets emotional and shakes her head)

[The tape pauses. The question is repeated and a more composed Mary replies]

**MC:** I would hope they never have to go through it because it is not a happy time. They should try to have people that can talk instead of bearing arms. That would be much better than having to send your kids to war.

**Q:** But if war came?

**MC:** But if war came, you pick up your arms and you go. Whatever you have to do, you do. We have done it in this country for so many years, so many different wars. You have to do your part, so you do it. There is nothing else you can do. You don't hold back, you go.

**Q:** Mary, I want to thank you very much. I find it very interesting to talk to people that have lived through such trying times. Thank you again.

**MC:** Thank you.