

## War Era Story Project 2012

Submitted by: Joseph P. Villari  
Current home town: Cincinnati, Ohio  
Age: 85

I am writing about one experience among many that took place while I served in the United States Navy during World War II. In February 1945 I received orders to report to Bremerton, Washington, and was assigned to the aircraft carrier *U.S.S. Wasp (CV-18)* as a replacement for one of the men that had been killed or wounded from a bomb hit that penetrated the flight deck and exploded in the galley, killing 102 men and wounding over 200.

I was assigned as a plane captain, or "brown shirt," and put in charge of a F6F Grumman Hellcat fighter plane (#112). My job was to be with the plane at all times. If it was in the hangar deck, I would have to stay in the hangar deck with it to ensure that the plane was always ready for action; when it was on the flight deck, my job was to be in the plane warming it up prior to launch. My other duties included making sure that the plane was properly armed and gassed, that the pilot's oxygen tank was working properly, and that the pilot had a full canteen of water in the plane.

When the pilots came out to their assigned planes, I would help strap the pilot of my plane into his seat. Then, prior to the plane's launch, I would remove the chocks from their positions in front of the plane's wheels. When the plane returned from a mission, I would check the plane for bullet holes or shrapnel damage. The plane would then be re-armed and made ready for its next flight.

On August 9, 1945, the army air force dropped the second atom bomb at Nagasaki. On that day, the *Wasp's* air group was launching a mission to bomb the Honshu airfield. My pilot was in his plane waiting to see if he would be needed to join the other fighters in the air cover group. The plane was on the catapult, ready for takeoff. I was standing next to the plane when one of our aircraft spotted a Japanese "Grace" dive bomber diving towards the ship from 7,000 feet.

One of our planes attacked the enemy dive bomber and set one wing afire. The pilot then pulled away so that our gun crews could pour lead into the plane that was making the last kamikaze attack on the fleet during the war. The Japanese plane exploded overhead and plopped into the sea less than 100 feet off our starboard bow. Bits of wreckage from the dive bomber showered the deck of the *Wasp*. I picked up a piece of what had been the Japanese pilot's navigational chart. I have it to this day.

On August 15th we received the word that Japan had surrendered, ending the *Wasp's* 21½ months combat during World War II. Ten days later, with the war behind us, the *Wasp* was caught in a Pacific typhoon. Wind gusts reached 78 knots. Giant waves smashed down 30 feet of the forward part of the flight deck. As a result of this damage, the *Wasp* was unable to participate with other ships in the fleet at the Japanese surrender in Tokyo Bay on September 2, 1945. By then, the *Wasp* was on her way to Pearl Harbor for repairs.