Editor's Note:

As we reflect on our past history aboard the Wasp, many of our members still remember with vivid memories, the date of March 19, 1945 as if it just happened yesterday. On that date, the Wasp came under a surprise attach and was bombed by a lone Japanese plane at 7:09 in the morning. With the loss of 102 of its crew members, plus another 270 who were injured, this horrific event is not easily forgotten.

Wasp, Fired by Bomb, Rallied, Took on Planes in 50 Minutes

By CARLYLE HOLT

ABOARD THE U.S.S. WASP, On Way to Boston — At 7:09 on the morning of March 19 a Japanese plane dove out of a cloud above the Wasp while she was about 40 miles from the Japanese island of Kyusho and dropped a 560-pound armor-piercing bomb on her. The bomb pierced the flight deck, the hangar deck and No. 2 deck, and exploded in the crew's galley on No. 3 deck aft.

The Wasp had just "secured" from General Quarters, which the crew had been standing since 2 in the morning. The ship was preparing to serve breakfast. About two-thirds of the Wasp's planes had taken off for a strike against airfields in Japan. Men flying in the second squadron were still in sight of the ship, saw her get hit and continued their mission, not knowing whether the Wasp would be afloat when they returned. The first squadron was expected back from its attack momentarily.

The Jap plane, which had managed to reach the radar's blind spot directly over the ship without being detected, consequently made its dive and dropped its bomb before anything more than a short burst of 20-millimeter fire could be directed at it.

The bomb, slanting aft, cleared one of the pilot's ready rooms by inches, hit a plane on the hangar deck which exploded and started a raging gasoline fire in the hangar, passed through one of the crew's quarters on deck No. 2 and burst in the galley directly underneath.

What happened immediately following the explosion might be taken as typical of similar heavy hits on other ships.

Two minutes before the Wasp was struck, the Franklin had been hit by two bombs and somewhere over the horizon was then starting the desperate fight for survival that ultimately saved the ship.

Perhaps in these days of atomic bombs and blockbusters, a 500-pound bomb does not sound like very big stuff. But in the constricted small compartments of a ship's hull, the explosion of such a missile is terrific. The blast and concussion is traveled throughout the ship. The blast was twofold: a terrific concussion and a searing wave of heat. Men several compartments away, perhaps 150 feet from the scene, were knocked down and injured or burned. Men further away were dazed.

The explosion tore a hole 22 feet in diameter in No. 3 deck and bulged No. 4 deck about a foot. This downward thrust was directly above No. 4 boiler room. In its inward thrust the explosion tore a 20-foot hole in No. 2 deck, bulged the hangar deck upward and ruptured it.

There was already a raging fire on the hangar deck from the plane that had been hit and exploded when the bomb passed through. This explosion had set fire to several other planes, which were in the act of taking on gasoline. Jagged pieces of steel shot into a ready room where some of the pilots remaining on board were being briefed preparatory to take-off. One pilot was killed and two or three wounded.

On the open hangar deck, where the blast had a comparatively free sweep, men were blown all over the place. Some skidded across the steel deck 50 to 60 feet. Others banged against bulkheads. Flaming gasoline filled the deck with dense black smoke.

Simultaneously, on decks two, three and four, fires were blazing in dozens of places.

But the serious damage was the breaking of six of the big water mains used for fighting fires. Tons of water were pouring into the ship through these pipes. Sprinklers on the hangar deck had been turned on to squelch the fires up there and some of this water, with burning gasoline floating in it, poured through the hole into the lower decks, adding to the immense amount of water already flooding in there.

No one then knew how many casualties there were or where they were. In all, 102 men of the Wasp were killed and 270 were wounded, of whom one died later.

At this moment, immediately after the explosion, the concern was to save the ship. Best testimony to the speed and efficiency with which the crew did the job is that the hangar fire was out in 15 minutes and the ship was taking planes on board within 50 minutes of the time the bomb hit. This was not achieved by accident.

Within an hour or so of the bomb hit a kamikaze plane missed the Wasp by a few feet, so close that the wing tip of the Jap suicider nicked the exterior plane elevator on the port side. Explosion of the kamikaze sounded so loud inside the ship that men below decks thought the ship had been hit again. In the engine room, in fact, the concussion of this explosion, was more violent than the sound of the bomb.

Damage done by the bomb was extensive and messy but not vital and the Wasp continued operations for some days before withdrawing for repairs.

— Reprint - BOSTON GLOBE

— The above article was submitted by Ernest W. Anderson and was published previously in the March 2008 Waspirit —