

USS Enterprise CV-6 veteran chronicled his days of war and peace

Written by Jean Bartlett, 2016

(for the family of Angelo Mazza and Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery, Colma)



MAZZA, ANGELO F. (1919-2011)

*(Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery, Colma, CA.
Our Lady of Lourdes, Crypt 506)*

On January 15, 1904, there was a wedding in Piedemonte Etneo, a tiny village at the foot of Mount Etna located in the Italian Region Sicily, the largest island in the Mediterranean Sea. It was the marriage of Antonino and Rosaria "Rose" Mazza. Both Antonino (born October 17, 1877) and Rose (born February 2, 1879) had lived in Piedemonte Etneo since birth and perhaps would have stayed there but for two reasons: financial struggles and the devastating Messina Earthquake, which took place at 5:20 a.m. local time on December 28, 1908. Measured by today's Richter scale, the quake's magnitude was 7.2. It ran along the Straits of Messina, between the island of Sicily and mainland Italy. It was followed by a horrific tsunami which brought 40-foot waves, causing massive loss of life in the city of Messina in Sicily and the Calabria region of southern Italy, anywhere from 72,000 deaths to 150,000. Aftershocks continued until 1913.

In 1910, with their two young sons, Salvatore "Sam" and Giovanni "John," beside them, Antonino and Rose boarded the SS Duca di Genova in Naples and entered the United States at New York City on April 24, 1910. The family would make their way to San Francisco, with a stop first in West Virginia where Antonino's brother lived. For a brief time Antonino worked as a manual laborer in West Virginia, building tracks for the railroad. However, before the end of that year, the family would move to San Francisco and buy their home at 414 Hearst Avenue.

On Antonino's September 12, 1918, WWI Draft Registration Card, the senior Mazza, then 40, noted that he worked as a laborer for Illinois Pacific Glass Company at 15th and Folsom. He and his wife had also added four more children to their family: Harry, Joseph, Guido and Mary. On September 12, 1919 their youngest child, Angelo Fred Mazza was born.

"How would I describe my dad?" Angelo's daughter, Nancy Mazza, said of her late father. "He was fabulous, funny, a hard worker, full of stories, generous, sweetly emotional, a good writer and so much more."

Nancy and her brothers, Tom and Jim, have a number of stories written by their dad about his life. One group of his stories chronicle his Navy experiences during the Second World War aboard an aircraft carrier. He was very proud of his service. It's a suede-bound book and in it, Angelo detailed his remembrances in beautiful script using white ink on black construction paper. Decades later, Angelo wrote an untitled autobiography on his computer. Both of Angelo's "books" are treasured family keepsakes and many of his thoughts are shared here. It begins with what Angelo calls: "A Factual Story of an Italian Family – Six Brothers and One Sister, Living in San Francisco."

"Dad worked for \$40.00 per month," Angelo wrote, "working 14 hour days. Harry, John and Joe caddied as young men and were paid 50 cents a bag with about a 25 cent tip. I picked potatoes for market and was paid 5 cents a box and 25 cents for a 100 pound sack of smaller potatoes. We were a poor family but never hungry as Dad had a backyard full of produce and a chicken coop, and Ma made jars of pasta sauce to last a year."

"These were Depression years from the stock market crash of 1929," Angelo went on to write. "Newspapers were selling for 3 cents. People sold apples on the corner to earn 5 cents. At 10 years old, I pushed a wheelbarrow with a metal wheel, full of garden tools, about a mile to cut a lawn for 50 cents and was offered a penny for watering the lawn. Everything seemed so normal."

Angelo's dad had built a barbecue in the family's backyard and Saturday's meal was always a barbecue and Sundays were boiled chicken, pasta and salad. Every Friday, Angelo's mom bought fresh fish from the fish peddler who traveled along their street. Angelo's brother Harry played AA baseball for the Sunnyside team. The DiMaggio brothers played for Del Monte Meat Company.

"My dad always said his family didn't particularly notice the Depression since they didn't have much money before it," Nancy noted. "They owned their home on Hearst and with their vegetable garden and chicken coop, his mom had no trouble feeding seven children."

In the spring of 1931, Angelo was rushed to St. Joseph Hospital in extreme pain. An emergency appendectomy was performed but the next day, his pain was still intense. Specialists arrived from Stanford Medical Center. Unable to define the cause, emergency exploratory surgery revealed an infection in the area of his kidneys. "The surgical wound was clamped and drained for about two months in the hospital." Eventually Angelo went home – healed, but on bed rest. These were Depression years and the medical bills were staggering. More than 60 years later, Angelo wrote about this episode in his autobiography as his eldest brother's generosity still touched him deeply. Sam was in the early days of what would eventually become a hugely successful career as a San Francisco painting and interior decorating contractor. Sam paid off all his little brother's medical bills by providing free paint jobs for every doctor involved.

Angelo went on to Balboa High School and graduated in 1937. After high school, he owned and ran a grocery store on Monterey Boulevard in San Francisco.

On Sunday, December 7, 1941, the four brothers Angelo called "the golfing brothers – John, Harry, Joe and Angelo," all went, per usual, to 6:30 a.m. Mass so they could get to the golf course in San Mateo. They were playing the sixth hole when they heard the news that Japanese planes had attacked the United States Naval Base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii Territory, killing more than 2,300 Americans.

Harry had just completed one year of service in the Army and was called back to active duty. John enlisted in the Army. Angelo put his grocery store up for sale and joined the Navy: "Because a dear friend who had joined was a Yeoman 3rd Class. He said I would probably be given a storekeeper rating."

Angelo got in line for the Navy, passed the physical and was told he was now in the Navy as Storekeeper 3rd Class. He went home to await further orders. His store sold and until he was called for duty, his good

friend Arnold Spinetti, manager of Marin Dell Milk Company on Howard Street, asked Angelo to work for him. He would also have a job waiting for him at Marin Dell when he returned.

Boot Camp was in San Diego, January of 1942. Next came a transfer to the Treasure Island Commissary. Angelo was part of a crew that assisted in the take-off and landing of the blimp detail. It was stressful. Strong winds could keep a blimp airborne and in one incident, winds pulled a member of the crew still holding a landing rope over the water. Thankfully he made it back safely. One blimp took off with two officers and never returned, nor was it ever found.

With the War escalating in the Pacific, Angelo was told there was a need for more sailors and so he attended trade school at the Armory in Detroit, Michigan. Following graduation, the Electrician's Mate 3rd Class was transferred to the Pacific Fleet. Sent to Ford Island, the epicenter of the attack on December 7, 1941, Angelo's orders were to wait for further transfer.

"The following morning my name appeared to receive my destination," Angelo wrote. "Would you know with my luck, they started out calling for Sub Base. Sub Base! I didn't think I could serve under water most of the time so I asked if there was anything else. The officer asked if I liked airplanes and I immediately thought that was great. I could fly. I tried to get in the Air Force but they only accepted four years of college as a requirement. That I did not have, so that transferred me to the Aircraft Carrier Enterprise. I was so pleased. But not long after I learned the Sub Base selections never got submarine duty. They stayed on the island repairing subs and winding motors and lived in town. Moral? Keep your mouth shut!"

Angelo boarded a Pacific duty destroyer which went in search of the Enterprise. The USS Enterprise CV-6 was the sixth aircraft carrier of the United States Navy and she would become the most decorated ship of the Second World War. For the Electrician's Mate, it was nearly three weeks of seasickness until he walked the gangplank of the Enterprise. Card-playing career Navy personnel in his bunk quarters, unimpressed with "the Reserves who had come to win the War for us," told him to grab some rags out of the rag locker and make himself a bed, amongst all their feet, under the table where they were playing cards.

"I'm lying there thinking welcome aboard when the phone rings," Angelo wrote. "Then I hear, 'Hey, Mazza, get down to the galley. They blew a fuse.' I had never changed a fuse before and couldn't even find the fuse box and returned. So one of the guys came and changed the fuse. He was one great guy to have as a friend during my time aboard. He was from Mississippi, or wherever they make moonshine, and he had built a still and made moonshine, drop by drop, for putting in the coffee. He even got the alcohol out of carbon tetrachloride, which we used for cleaning motors."

Angelo's duties pertained to: flight deck lighting; island structure for the admiral, captains and officers; and pilot's ready rooms. (A ready room is where on-duty pilots stand by on an aircraft carrier.) Each night, Angelo, in the dark, opened the landing lights. "It took half an hour for your eyes to adjust to seeing silhouettes so you didn't walk into revolving propellers."

The Electrician's Mate wrote of the numerous Japanese suicide missions he saw. The Japanese would fly from about 30,000 feet with the sun at their backs so the ship's gunners had the sun in their eyes. "But the gunners put up a blanket of bullets." The Enterprise, nicknamed the Fighting Lady, was hit by Kamikaze pilots a few times with a force that blew some of the Marine gunners overboard. Destroyers stayed behind to pick up survivors. One of those Kamikaze crashes nearly got Angelo. He had to make a split decision to dive wildly out of the way or dive 60 feet into the water. The drop to the water looked too frightening so he dove wildly out of the way and made it.

Angelo wrote that his most heroic venture was taking on the assignment to fix the light on the mast pole "nearly 200 feet from the water line and 60 feet over the smoke stacks." It wasn't a command order because the Ensign who requested it knew it was risky. Angelo, no fan of heights, took the duty. He

climbed up the side of the smoke stacks and then up the pole, which at the top, he noted, "was not more than a few inches larger than my hand."

He cleared the problem of corrosion forming against the metal frame causing the short circuit. As he started his descent, he noticed the fleet was turning counterclockwise. "Besides the smoke, the ship would list to starboard and about 140 feet to water, and when it righted itself, I'm looking down the smoke stack and cremation looks imminent – and then to port side looking at the water again. I thought it was heroic and I'd receive a medal. Nah, just another job, tougher than changing the kitchen fuse as far as any others cared. Three weeks later the blinking reoccurred and guess who went up to fix the beacon light? None other than my moonshiner friend."

Action Against Japan
SUBSEQUENT to NOV. 15, 1942

| Date | Action | Men's Recovered | Japanese Losses | | Other Instances Destroyed |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|------------------|---------------------------------|
| | | | ships Sunk | ships Damaged | |
| Jan 30, 1943 | Action Off Rennell Island | 11 | | | |
| Nov 19-21, 1943 | Gilbert Island Occupation | 3 | | | ☆ |
| Dec. 4, 1943 | Kwajalein Atoll Raid | 14 | 3 | 8 | ☆ |
| Jan. 29 to Feb 1, 1944 | Marshall Islands Occupation | 12 | | 4 | ☆ |
| Feb. 16-17, 1944 | Truk Islands Raid | 75 | 10 | 28 | ☆ |
| Feb. 20, 1944 | Galvit Raid | 1 | | | ☆ |
| Mar 30 to Apr 1, 1944 | Palau-Woleai - Yap Island Raids | 29 | 3 | 20 | ☆ |
| Apr. 20-24, 1944 | Hollandia Occupation | 81 | | | ☆ |
| Apr. 29-30, 1944 | Truk Islands Raid | 23 | | 5 | ☆ |
| June 11 to July 5, 1944 | Marianas Islands Occupation | 39 | 3 | 2 | ☆ |
| June 19-20, 1944 | Battle of the Philippine Sea | 32 | | 3 | |
| Aug. 31 to Sept 3 '44 | BONIN Island Raid | | 3 | 4 | ☆ |
| Sept 6 to 18 '44 | Palau Occupation | | | | ☆ |
| | Totals | 320 | 22 | 74 | |

Detailed Navy log by Angelo Mazza of events transpiring during his time aboard the USS Enterprise.

The USS Enterprise CV-6 had crucial roles in numerous battles which include: Midway, Guadalcanal, Leyte Gulf and the "Doolittle Raid" on Tokyo. By War's end she had earned 20 battle stars. By War's end, everyone on board the Enterprise had seen a lot of casualties.

"Very few know that the Enterprise was supposed to be in Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941," Angelo wrote. "The regular sailors said they were 50 miles off Pearl Harbor, training a flight group one extra day and had no ammunition aboard to fight the Japanese aircraft. When they heard the news they immediately headed for their base, loaded up for war, and had minimal engagement with the enemy that day."

"After Japan surrendered," Angelo wrote later in his autobiography, "I turned to my shipmates and said, 'Now that I won the War, I am returning my screwdriver and pliers and thanks for all the help.'"

When Angelo returned home, his heart was immediately touched by the sight of his mother looking out the picture window. He stopped at the church across from the family home and offered his prayers of thanksgiving "for a wonderful safe journey of four years."

After the War, Angelo worked for his friend Arnold Spinetti for several months. Then he bought a grocery store on Monterey Boulevard which he worked at seven days a week, from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m., until he sold the store in 1953. The majority of his working career, however, was spent in real estate and the savings and loan industry.

He met Dorothy Boyle in 1946 at a dance at St. Finn Barr Catholic Church, which was right across the street from the Mazza home. They married at St. Finn Barr on May 3, 1947, and bought a home in the West Portal neighborhood of San Francisco where the family became very involved members of their neighborhood parish, St. Cecilia on 17th Avenue.

Their first child, Nancy, was born in 1948. Two sons followed: Tom, born in 1950, and Jim, born in 1955. Dorothy, 1925-1998, had worked at Metropolitan Life Insurance. After the birth of their first child, she did not work outside of the home. But she was famous for her volunteer work with many Catholic organizations.

"Three nicer children no parents could hope for," Angelo wrote in his autobiography, "and another chapter could be devoted to their accomplishments."

Angelo would want his love for Dorothy, his wife of 51 years, to be honored within his story along with his love for his four grandchildren – Jason, Sean, David and Melanie Mazza – who made him proud every day. He would also want to highlight that he was an "avid fan of the San Francisco Giants, the San Francisco 49ers, the Golden State Warriors and the PGA" and that he was a 50-plus year member of San Francisco's Olympic Club. Known for his ability to "make a stranger feel like a friend," Angelo died just four days shy of his 92nd birthday on September 8, 2011.

This particular biography can be found in Jean Bartlett's 2016-released book, "Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery, Colma: Roll Call ~ Reveille," which offers 55 biographies on individuals, now at rest at Holy Cross, who served in wars dating back to the U.S.-Mexican War and on through the Civil War, Spanish-American War, World War I and World War II. The book is available at Holy Cross, www.holycrosscemeteries.com.