



CHARLES ALFRED PILLSBURY

1935

Charles Pillsbury was the third of four brothers who, one or more at a time, were continually at the School from 1927 to 1939. He entered the Second Form in 1930 and graduated in 1935. He won his S.P.S. in football, hockey and rowing, and was awarded the Gordon Medal. In his Sixth Form year he was three times elected to the Council, and he "supervised" in the Lower. On graduation from Yale, where he played three years on the Varsity hockey team and rowed two years on the Junior Varsity crew, he worked for about a year in the Investment Department of the Northwestern National Bank in Minneapolis.

In the summer of 1940 he enlisted in the Navy. He received his wings and was commissioned Ensign in June, 1941, after training at Pensacola. Assigned to multi-engined patrol bombers, he received additional training at Pensacola and at Corpus Christi, and then was selected as specialized instructor in the use of flying instruments. In July, 1942, he was transferred to Floyd Bennett Field to ferry new types of Navy fighters to the Pacific Coast. That October he was assigned to the Naval Station at Dahlgren, Virginia; thence detached to Debert, Nova Scotia, for experimental work in association with civilian scientists and technicians from the U. S. Naval Ordnance Bureau.

After two months in Nova Scotia, Pillsbury was ordered back to Dahlgren, and shortly thereafter assigned to Fighting Squadron Seventeen, then fitting out in Norfolk, Virginia. This squadron, of which Pillsbury became operational officer, is described in "Blackburn's Irregulars," an article by Robert de Vore, published in *Collier's*

*Weekly*: it is stated to have consisted mainly of young "individualists" who had proved unmanageable in other squadrons. The organization had great *esprit de corps* and a brilliant record.

The squadron left the United States aboard U.S.S. *Bunker Hill*, and after a short service in the Atlantic, went to the Southwest Pacific. There it was detached from the carrier and land-based at Ondongo, New Georgia. From then on it had a great many hours of very active combat duty in the area between Rabaul and Bougainville. On November 11, 1943, for example, the squadron was en route from Ondongo to raid Rabaul when it was called on to protect a large task force proceeding toward Empress Augusta Bay: Pillsbury's own flight log indicates that he flew over ten combat hours that one day, re-fuelling and getting ammunition from various carriers in the task force.

Ten days after that, Pillsbury was reported missing in action. Commander Blackburn wrote: "He and Ensign Hogan were strafing Japanese positions on the southeast end of Bougainville Island on Nov. 21 [1943]; they split to avoid a particularly heavy concentration of anti-aircraft guns and when Hogan turned back to rejoin he could not find Charles. He searched as long as he had sufficient fuel and the squadron subsequently made extensive careful search for a period of three days. Unfortunately, the jungle growth in that area is extremely thick and it is virtually impossible to see even a house, even if directly over it . . . the circumstances of his disappearance make it almost a certainty that he was shot down at tree top level, which gives absolutely minimum chance of survival. . . . I know I speak for the whole squadron when I say that we could have spared anyone else better. Charles was careful and painstaking in his instruction of the younger pilots who, to a man, worshipped him. We always teased him about his inquisitive mind and love for figuring out and testing the solution of difficult problems, but respected, the while, the results and the knowledge obtained. . . . Charles was a gallant, excellent officer and a 'good shipmate' and I am proud to have had him under my command."