JOSEPH PRENTICE WILLETTS

Energy and courage distinguished Prentice Willetts from the time he was a very small boy. He was captain of many lower teams in his first years at St. Paul's. When he was a Sixth Former he won his S.P.S. in football and hockey, and he was captain and bow of the second Shattuck crew. At Harvard, he was Freshman hockey captain, played three years on the Varsity and was Varsity captain his last year.

In college, Willetts took the Naval R.O.T.C. course and was commissioned Ensign on graduation in June, 1941. That September, however, he resigned his commission and went to Pensacola, as an aviation cadet. He became an Ensign again March 30, 1942, and was then stationed for over a year at Banana River, Florida. Promoted Lieutenant (j.g.), he was assigned in April, 1943, to VP-210, a Patrol Squadron flying Mariners (PBM-3's), and given command of Ship 9.

After two weeks at Norfolk, Va., the squadron went to Quonset for further operational training, mainly practice against submarines. In these essential and dangerous maneuvers, a friendly submarine is reported in a certain area, a plane searches for it, detects it, dives with full throttle to within a few feet of the water and races to the spot to be in a position to destroy it.

On the morning of August 18, 1943, Prentice's Mariner took off from Quonset in search of its training target, a submarine a few miles south of Montauk Point, in Long Island Sound. The submarine commander afterwards reported that at eleven o'clock he sighted the Mariner three and a half miles distant, and immediately crash dived.

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When he raised his periscope to follow the movement of the attacking plane, he saw only a column of smoke in the direction in which the plane had previously been sighted. The submarine surfaced and was at the scene of the accident in a very few minutes. All that was found was an oil slick and a few small pieces of wreckage.

Lieutenant Commander Sheppard, commanding officer of VP-210, wrote in a letter: "The airplane was in excellent condition, almost new, and flying conditions were excellent. However, the sea was rough with large swells. Since there were no eyewitnesses or survivors, and the aircraft cannot be recovered, it is doubtful if the exact cause of the crash can be determined. . . . Lieutenant Willetts was one of our most experienced pilots in the squadron and was held in high esteem for his professional abilities. It will be impossible to replace him or the eleven other excellent men who lost their lives in this accident."

Prentice Willetts was married at Pensacola, March 30, 1942, the day he received his commission, to Mary Louise Wiener of Milwaukee.