



Major Gregory "Pappy" Boyington

December 4, 1912 - January 11, 1988

Obituary of Pappy Boyington

Pappy Boyington Field: A Campaign to Honor a Hero--Medal of Honor

Gregory Boyington was born in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho on December 4, 1912. He spent his childhood years in St. Maries, where he had his first flight with the legendary barn-stormer pilot Clyde Pangborn. Eventually his mother moved to Tacoma, Washington and later he graduated from Lincoln High School.

He attended the University of Washington, where he graduated with a B.S. in Aeronautical Engineering. He would then go on to work for the Boeing Company as a draftsman and engineer.

He would eventually enter the U.S. Marine Corps, and after completion of the Officer Training he went on to flight training. He possessed natural abilities that distinguish him in the cockpit early on, but his lifestyle was not without controversy.

Boyington was offered a position with a group that would eventually become the

American Volunteer Group (AVG), better known as the Flying Tigers. He resigned his commission in the Marine Corps and set off to China to fly against the Japanese.

At the outbreak of WWII, after making his way back from China, he managed to return to the Marine Corps with a Major's commission. As he was already an experienced fighter pilot with victories against the Japanese, his skills were much needed in the war effort.

From Guadalcanal he would eventually assume command of a group of pilots who were not already assigned to a squadron, and they would go on to be known as the "Black Sheep Squadron". Because he was older than the other pilots, they would call him "Gramps" and eventually that led to "Pappy" and it stuck. (He was 31 years old).

The Black Sheep Squadron amassed an impressive record of victories against the Japanese. Pappy Boyington was credited with 26 victories, until he was himself shot down over the Pacific and captured by the Japanese. He spent 20 months as a Prisoner of War, and was listed as Missing in Action for the duration of the war. Upon his liberation from the prison camp at the end of the war, he returned stateside and was greeted as a hero. He informed the Marines that on his final mission he downed two enemy aircraft, and his wingman downed one before he was too was shot down. His wingman, Capt. George Ashmun was killed.

The paperwork for his award of the Medal of Honor was already working

through the system when he was shot down, it would be approved by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. With his status listed as missing and presumed dead, his award was held in the capitol until the end of the war.

Medal of Honor citation

His citation reads in full:

The President of the United States in the name of The Congress takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to

MAJOR GREGORY BOYINGTON

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS RESERVE

for service as set forth in the following CITATION:

For extraordinary heroism above and beyond the call of duty as Commanding Officer of Marine Fighting Squadron TWO FOURTEEN in action against enemy Japanese forces in Central Solomons Area from 12 September 1943 to 3 January 1944. Consistently outnumbered throughout successive hazardous flights over heavily defended hostile territory, Major Boyington struck at the enemy with daring and courageous persistence, leading his squadron into combat with devastating results to Japanese shipping, shore installations and aerial forces. Resolute in his efforts to inflict crippling damage on the enemy, Major Boyington led a formation of twenty-four fighters over Kahili on 17 October and, persistently circling the airdrome where sixty hostile aircraft were grounded, boldly challenged the Japanese to send up planes.

Under his brilliant command, our fighters shot down twenty enemy craft in the ensuing action without the loss of a single ship. A superb airman and determined fighter against overwhelming odds, Major Boyington personally destroyed 26 of the many Japanese planes shot down by his squadron and by his forceful leadership developed the combat readiness in his command which was a distinctive factor in the Allied aerial achievements in this vitally strategic area.

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

The Black Sheep Squadron

The Black Sheep squadron fought for eighty-four days. They met the Japanese over their own fields and territory and piled up a record of 203 planes destroyed or damaged, produced eight fighter aces with 97 confirmed air-to-air victories, sank several troop transports and supply ships, destroyed many installations, in addition to numerous other victories. For their actions, the original Black Sheep were awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for extraordinary heroism in action.

Marine Fighter Squadron 214 was originally commissioned on July 1, 1942, at Marine Corps Air Station Ewa, on the Island of Oahu. Initially called the "Swashbucklers", they participated in the Solomon Islands campaign, flying out of Henderson Field on Guadalcanal. They were disbanded following their combat tour and the squadron designation was given to the Marine command on Espiritu Santo.

In August 1943, a group of twenty-seven young men under the leadership of Major Gregory "Pappy" Boyington were joined together to form the original "Blacksheep" of VMF-214.

The call sign "Black Sheep" was chosen by the squadron to commemorate the unusual way in which the squadron had been formed. Originally the squadron called itself "Boyington's Bastards" after its commander, but this label was considered unacceptable by the press.

The pilots ranged from experienced combat veterans, with several air-to-air victories to their credit, to new replacement pilots from the United States.

Major Boyington and Major Stan

Bailey were given permission to form the unassigned pilots into a squadron, with the understanding that they would have less than four weeks to have them fully trained and ready for combat. They were very successful.

The Black Sheep Squadron has continued to serve to this day; having deployed to the Korean War, Vietnam War, Somalia, and The Global War on Terror.

Fred "Rope Trick" Losch, a Corsair pilot that joined the Black Sheep for their second combat tour at Vella Lavella. On January 2, 1944 he was credited with shooting down a Zero and damaging another over Rabaul. Lt. Losch flew 28 combat missions with VMF-214. He was also a life-long friend to Pappy. (Fred Losch seated in front row, fourth from right; "Pappy" is seated center front row.) Go to the Photo section and view the photos.

While his Medal of Honor Citation was awarded by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in March

1944; he was not decorated until October 5, 1945 due to his captivity by the Japanese.

In a White House ceremony with other Sailors and Marines, he was personally decorated by President Harry S. Truman. He was also awarded the Navy Cross, the nations second

highest honor, by the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Alexander A. Vandegrift.

Pappy Boyington died on January 11, 1988 in Fresno, California. He was buried with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery in Section 7-A.

Tribute Wall



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