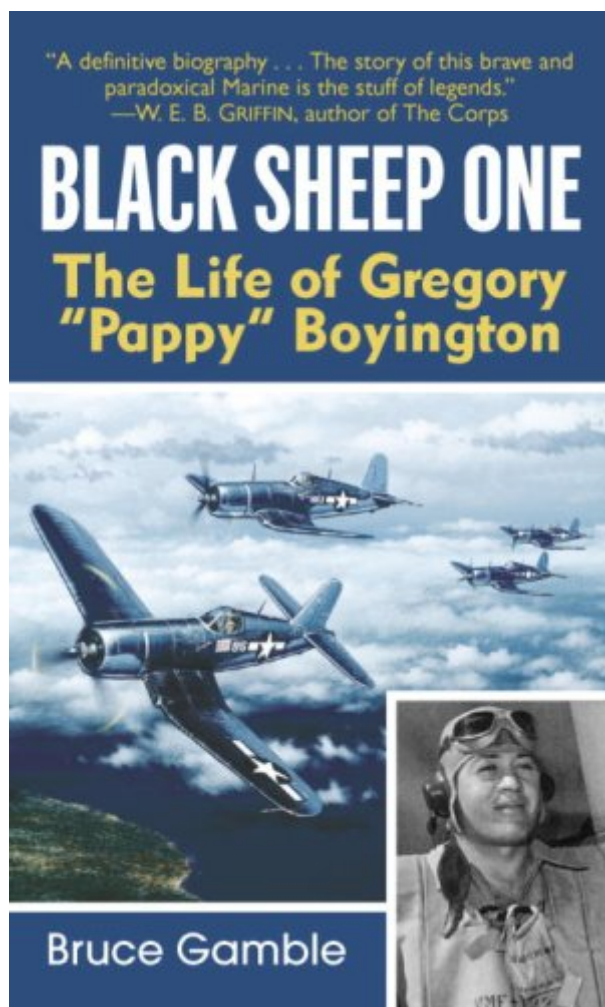


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Black Sheep One: The Life Of Gregory Pappy Boyington



Synopsis

Black Sheep One is the first biography of legendary warrior and World War II hero Gregory Boyington. In 1936, Boyington became an aviation cadet and earned the wings of a naval aviator. After only a short period on active duty, however, he was encouraged to resign from the Marine Corps due to his unconventional behavior. Remarkably, this inauspicious beginning was just the prologue to a heroic career as an American fighter pilot and innovative combat leader. With the onset of World War II, when skilled pilots were in demand, he became the commander of an ad hoc squadron of flying leathernecks. Led by Medal of Honor winner Boyington, the legendary Black Sheep set a blistering pace of aerial victories against the enemy. Though many have observed that when the shooting stops, combat heroes typically just fade away, nothing could be further from the truth for Boyington. Blessed with inveterate luck, the stubbornly independent Boyington lived a life that went beyond what even the most imaginative might expect. Exhaustively researched and richly detailed, here is the complete story of this American original. From the Paperback edition.

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Customer Reviews

Pappy Boyington is one of the most memorable pilots of World War II. But as he famously said: "Show me a hero, and I'll show you a bum." He did the best to prove his own maxim. As a member of the Flying Tigers of Burma and China, he was credited with two Japanese aircraft shot down, but left early and in such disfavor that he got a "dishonorable discharge" from its commander, Claire Chennault. He then re-joined the Marines and proceeded to build an unorthodox fighter squadron--the Black Sheep--with many similarities to the Tigers, with himself playing the role of Chennault. Shot down, he was awarded the Medal of Honor while serving time in two of Japan's most notorious prisons. He emerged alive at the end of the war, claiming to have accounted for enough Japanese planes on his final day to make him the leading USMC ace of World War II. It's a fascinating story, but Bruce Gamble goes beyond the war record to show us the boy growing up in a troubled family and following his seemingly doomed path to alcoholism and brawling and a troubled marriage of his own. Boyington's checkered career postwar is equally compelling. You feel sorry for him, angry at him, and in awe of him as one of the great shooters of all time. This is a brilliant book and an important one, and it belongs on the shelf of anyone with an interest in World War II aviation.

Gamble's biography of Boyington begins with his dysfunctional upbringing in the Pacific Northwest. Raised by a troubled mother and a ...stepfather, the deck was stacked early against this man of great potential. This good time Charlie, devil-may-care college boy became one of the leading Aces of WWII, with twenty-nine kills, if he is to be believed. And Gamble apparently does not believe all that Boyington has to say on this subject. Never drinking until his twenties, Boyington became the cliched drunk. Often he flew loaded or badly hung over. In this frank look at the life of the Black Sheep Squadron's leader, Gamble strips away much of the lies, myths and Hollywood trappings to present the man as he was; the tragic hero. From his brief time spent with Claire Chennault's Flying Tigers to his rejoining the Maine Aviators to his being awarded the Medal of Honor, the bottle was never far from arm's reach. After spending almost two years as a POW and upon his triumphant return to the states at war's end, he is told by his intelligence officer, Frank Walton, he could be anything he chose but he had to leave booze alone or it would kill him. Needless to say, his life spiraled out of control until it was much too late. From a series of failed relationships and marriages, to repeated job changes and financial ruin he became a mere curiosity hustling his former valor for a few dollars. In Walton's own book, "Once They Were Eagles", he compares him unkindly to a dancing circus bear pushing his autographs at air shows and conventions. Throughout the book there are more than a few glimmers of the man beneath the booze and the greatness that awaited Boyington were it not for his illness. A college wrestling

champion, a fine college student, a natural leader and above all, a bold and fearless fighter pilot. If Gamble destroys some myths, he also lets Boyington's greatness stand without the tinsel. And in 1943 he was a giant.

I hate biographies with their authoritarian tones, time lines, dates and obscure facts, and get bored before finishing them. I do, however, prefer to be historically accurate rather than politically correct, so when my children started watching Black Sheep Squadron on the History Channel, I figured I had better learn more about Greg Boyington. Having seen Mr. Gamble's commentaries during breaks from the show, I expected the typical pompous biography with a military cadence to match the author and subject. When I began to read it, I was floored: I couldn't put it down and I finished it. Mr. Gamble's prose was lyrical, and his treatment of Boyington was fair and meticulously researched. Heroes aren't necessarily bums, and biographies aren't necessarily dull, boring and omnipresent.

In this bio. of Greg 'Pappy' Boyington, the author adds so much to previous books. Through painstaking research, he covers aspects of Boyington's youth, early USMC career, and later life that I hadn't read before. Certainly not in Boyington's self-serving (but fascinating & enjoyable) Baa Baa Black Sheep, not in Gamble's previous book on the Black Sheep squadron. I found persuasive the author's analysis of Boyington claims for aerial credits. (Wonder if the USMC would? I doubt it, debunking Medal of Honor winners probably isn't real high on the Corps' list of priorities.) But this book equally conveys Boyington's combat leadership, and the reverence his men felt for him

While preparing for my senior seminar in History, I chose a topic that my WWII Marine grandfather introduced me to, the Black Sheep. I was disappointed in the way the world remembered the history of Pappy Boyington and the Black Sheep Squadron, seeing them as the misfits that they were portrayed to be by a 70s television show. These were American heroes and yet they were better remembered as renegade troublemakers. This was not the situation. I was at a loss of where I would come by all the detail and depth that I would need to review activities of fifty years ago. That's when I discovered Bruce Gamble's books. Loaded with facts and with extreme attention to detail, these books gave me more than I ever needed and were more than just required reading on this subject, the books were intriguing. As I read them, I felt as if I had been there. Without these books, my project would have been a wreck. Thanks Bruce, great books, waiting for more...

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