



**Gregory Boyington, Colonel USMC**  
“Pappy”

Date of Designation: 11 March 1937

Combat Awards:

Congressional Medal of Honors  
Navy Cross

**Duty Assignment Chronology**

Colonel Gregory “Pappy” Boyington, Marine Corps Ace credited with the destruction of 28 Japanese aircraft, was awarded the Medal of Honor “ for extraordinary heroism above and beyond the call of duty” while in command of a Marine Fighting Squadron in the Central Solomons Area from September 12, 1943 to January 3, 1944. He was shot down over Rabaul on the latter date, and his capture by the Japanese was followed by 20 months as a prisoner of war.

Gregory Boyington was born at Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, December 4, 1912. He was graduated from Lincoln High School in Tacoma, Washington, and majored in aeronautical engineering at the University of Washington, graduating in 1934 with a Bachelor of Science degree. He was a member of Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity. Always an athlete, he was a member of the college wrestling and swimming teams, and is a one-time holder of the Pacific Northwest Intercollegiate middle-weight wrestling title.

During his summer vacations he worked in either a mining, camp or a logging camp in his home state. One summer, he was employed by the Coeur d’Alene Fire Protective Association in road construction and lookout work.

The famed flyer started his military career while attending college. As a member of the Reserve Officers Training Corps for four years, he became a cadet captain. He was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Coast Artillery Reserve in June., 1934, and served two months of active duty with the 630th Coast Artillery at Fort Worden, Washington. On June 13, 1935 he enlisted in the Volunteer Marine Corps Reserve.

He went on active duty that date and returned to inactive duty on July 16.

In the meantime the Colonel had become a draftsman and engineer for the Boeing Aircraft Company of Seattle.

It was on February 18, 1936 that Boyington accepted an appointment as an aviation cadet in the Marine Corps Reserve. He was assigned to the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida for flight training. Years before, he first flew when he was only eight years old, with Clyde Pangborn, who later flew the Pacific non-stop.

He was designated a Naval Aviator on March 11, 1937, he was next transferred to Quantico, Virginia for duty with Aircraft One, Fleet Marine Force. He was discharged from the.. Marine Corps Reserve on July 1, 1937 in order to accept a second lieutenant’s commission in the regular Marine Corps the following day.

Detached to the Basic School, Philadelphia in July, 1938, Lieutenant Boyington was transferred to the Second Marine Aircraft Group at the San Diego Naval Air Station upon completion of his studies. With that unit he took part in fleet problems off the aircraft carriers USS *Lexington* and USS *Yorktown*.

Promoted to first lieutenant on November 4, 1940, he went back to Pensacola as an instructor the next month.

Lieutenant Boyington resigned his commission in the Marine Corps on August 26, 1941 to accept a position with the Central Aircraft Manufacturing Company. CAMCO was a civilian organization formed for the protection of the Burma Road. The unit later became known as the American Volunteer Group, the famed “Flying Tigers” of China. During his months with the “Tigers” Boyington became a squadron commander and shot down six Japanese planes to secure an appreciable lead over other American aces who didn’t get into the fight until after December 7, 1941. He flew 300 combat hours before the AVG disbanded. (Continued)

He returned to the United States in July, 1942 and accepted a first lieutenant's commission in the Marine Corps Reserve on September 29, that year. He reported for active duty at the Naval Air Station, San Diego on November 23, 1942, and was assigned to Marine Aircraft Wings, Pacific. The following day he was temporarily promoted to major in the Reserve, which is the rank in the regular Marine Corps he would have held had his service been continuous. Within two months, he was on his way overseas again.

Major Boyington joined Marine Aircraft Group Eleven of the First Marine Aircraft Wing and became Commanding Officer of Marine Fighting Squadron Two Fourteen after a short tour in the Solomons with another squadron. The new squadron was made up of a group of casuals, replacements, and green pilots and was dubbed the "Black Sheep" Squadron.

Before organizing the "Black Sheep," major Boyington had done some combat flying at Guadalcanal in April, 1943, as Executive Officer of Marine Fighting Squadron One Twenty Two, but he had added no enemy planes to his score there. However, during those two periods of intense activity in the Russell Islands-New Georgia and Bougainville-New Britain-New Ireland areas, Pappy, so named because of his age (31) compared to that of his men, added to his total almost daily. During his squadron's first tour of combat duty, the major personally shot down 14 enemy fighter planes in 32 days. On December 17, 1943, he headed the first Allied fighter sweep over impregnable Rabaul. By December 27, his record was 25. He tied the then-existing American record of 26 planes on January 3 when he shot down another fighter over Rabaul.

Typical of Major Boyington's daring feats is his attack on Kahili airdrome at the southern tip of Bougainville on October 17, 1943. He and 24 fighters circled the field persistently where 60 hostile aircraft were grounded, goading the Japs into sending up a large numerically superior force. In the fierce battle that followed, 20 of the enemy planes were shot out of the skies. The Black Sheep roared back to their base without the loss of a single ship.

On January 3, 1944, 48 American planes, including one division (4 planes) from the Black Sheep Squadron took off from Bougainville for a fighter-sweep over Rabaul. Pappy was tactical commander of the flight and arrived over Rabaul at eight o'clock in the morning. In the ensuing action the major was seen to shoot down his 26th plane. He then became mixed in the general melee of diving swooping planes and was not seen or heard from again. Following a determined search which proved futile, the major was declared as missing in action.

While a prisoner of the Japanese he was selected for temporary promotion to the rank of lieutenant colonel.

Came mid-August, 1945, the atom bombs, and the Japanese capitulation. Major Boyington was liberated from Japanese custody at Omori Prison Camp in the Tokyo area

on August 29 and arrived in the United States shortly afterwards.

On September 6, the top ace who had been a prisoner of the Japanese for the past 20 months accepted his temporary lieutenant colonel's commission in the Marine Corps.

At the time of his release it was confirmed that Colonel Boyington had accounted for two Japanese planes on that fateful January 3 before he himself was shot down. That set his total at 28 planes which is high for Marines.

Shortly after his return to his homeland, Colonel Boyington was ordered to Washington to receive the nation's highest honor, the Medal of Honor, from the President. The medal had been awarded by the late president, Franklin D. Roosevelt in March, 1944 and held in the Capital until such time as the colonel was able to receive it. On October 5, 1945, "Nimitz Day," he, together with a number of other Marines and Naval personnel appeared at the White House and was decorated by President Harry S. Truman.

On the day previous to that he was presented the Navy Cross by the Commandant of the Marine Corps for the ace's heroic achievements on the day he became missing in action.

Following the receipt of his Medal of Honor and Navy Cross, Colonel Boyington made a Victory Bond Tour. Originally ordered to the Marine Corps Schools, Quantico, he was later directed to report to the Commanding General, Marine Air West Coast, Marine Corps Air Depot, Miramar, San Diego, California.

Colonel Boyington was retired from the Marine Corps on August 1, 1947 and, because he was specially commended for the performance of duty in actual combat, he was advanced to his present rank.

In addition to the Medal of Honor and Navy Cross, Colonel Boyington holds the American Defense Service Medal; Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal; American Campaign Medal; and the World War II Victory Medal.

He had three children - Gregory Boyington, Jr., born May 24, 1935; Janet Sue Boyington, born January 26, 1938; and Gloria Boyington.