

BOYINGTON

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Pappy Boyington doesn't consider himself a hero. In fact, he doesn't even consider himself to be brave.

"A lot of times," according to Pappy, "people give credit for great bravery. I know I have received it, but in many cases it is linked up with this word 'hero,' which I don't like very well, because so many of the things I did were done because I was a competent old pro. I knew all the odds; I knew the consequences. Many of these things I did might look heroic and harum-scarum as the dickens, but I was actually safer than I would be here on the freeways. That is one of the things I transmitted to these young pilots. Of course, in order to make these pilots feel at ease, number one, you eliminate all the unnecessary fear and then you also caution these guys to do without getting angry, because with those two items—anger or fear—you can't think properly, and if you can't think properly, you are a danger to yourself and anybody who is counting on you."

When Pappy returned from World War II as the man who beat Eddie Rickenbacker's record of 26 enemy planes shot down (Boyington had 28 confirmed kills to become the Marine Corps's top ace, although his men believed a more accurate figure to be 40), he received a hero's welcome and embarked on a seemingly endless tour of bond drives, interviews, and testimonials. But Pappy Boyington never allowed the hero treatment to change his self-image and destroy

him the way it has destroyed other men. He never fully accepted it as a part of reality.

"I was under no illusions that this kind of treatment was going to last. It was just a temporary thing. In fact, I would see it in the faces that were around there. People wanted to get in a camera shot with you because you were front line publicity, but as far as this getting me any place directly, I knew that was out. One day the police were holding a guy back at this big parade and I said, 'Leave him alone.' He wanted to say something, quite obviously. He was older than I and looked kind of bedraggled. He was a World War I vet, obviously, although he didn't say; but when he got to where I could hear him I said, 'What did you want to say, friend?' And he said, 'Enjoy it while you can, Pappy, because tomorrow they won't even hire you to clean up the streets.' And I just laughed and said, 'I'm way ahead of you, friend. I already know that.'"

What made Gregory Boyington such a celebrity after the war were the much publicized exploits of his now legendary Black Sheep Squadron and Pappy's reputation as somewhat of a character—a drinking, carousing maverick who flouted military regulations and ran the best air fighting unit in the South Pacific. He and his Black Sheep were a wellspring of good material for the war correspondents to send home. Actually,

Pappy has a great respect for military regulations, but he is also pragmatic, and he knew what it took to run the Black Sheep.

"I had a few basic rules," he recalls. "I said, 'Listen, I'm not going to threaten you like Lard [Pappy's immediate superior, a stickler for military discipline who resented Pappy and his Black Sheep, had the honor of receiving that unflattering nickname.] does with a court-martial; that's over your heads. It would take six or seven months to do that, and none of you are worried about six or seven months from now. But I'll tell you what I will do, and I'll do it right now: I'm only going to give you three or four rules, but if you break any one of them, I'm going to get you out of this squadron *today*—you can understand that—and I won't be the least bit careful about what squadron I get you put into! Now there was a real bunch of duds in the squadron, and I never had anybody violate any one of my simple rules.'"

Pappy's rules were mostly concerned with safety and getting along. First and foremost, Boyington banned victory rolls, the practice of coming right off the deck and doing a slow roll for each enemy plane the pilot shot down. He knew that the British lost many of their top fighter pilots that way during the Battle of Britain because the pilot had no way of knowing how badly his plane was damaged. But the rest were "just

STILL A LEGEND BUT NEVER A HERO



Boyington (right) shot down 28 Japanese planes before he was shot down over Rabaul, New Britain, by Masajiro (Mike) Kawato (left), a petty officer third class in the Japanese Imperial Navy, on January 4, 1944. Kawato was eigh-



teen years old at the time. He shot down eighteen Allied planes before being shot down and taken prisoner by the Australians. Today, the two former enemies are the best of friends.

rules," says Pappy, "simple rules about how we were going to get along. We didn't care about the rest of the Marine Corps or the rest of the United States or the rest of the world. It was just like being out to sea: what do you care who the President of the United States is or anything else? You're on your own, and that's the way we had to live."

The Black Sheep owed their success to several factors, the most important of which was that Pappy was able to pick his pilots. Technically, he "stole" the squadron, which really just amounted to stealing a number, 214. The Black Sheep were formed over-

seas from the remnants of other fighter squadrons. Most squadrons were formed in Washington and men were assigned to them before going overseas, and most of the time a commander didn't know who he was getting, or even if they liked to fly fighters. But Pappy knew each of his men and their talents and abilities before they ever went up in combat, and he himself was an experienced combat pilot when he entered the South Pacific, having served in China and Burma with the Flying Tigers before American entry into World War II, shooting down six Japanese planes.

The Black Sheep were dedicated pilots, craving the opportunity to go into combat. Pappy credits that urge not to a love for war and violence but the spirit of high adventure. "The spirit of high adventure can happen in a war just like it can climbing Mount Everest or going to the depths of the ocean farther than equipment has ever let anybody go before. I mean there is always going to be a man there first. A young man has an adrenalin flow and his body craves this, apparently—some more so than others. I talked to a high school group they [the teachers] told me was hard to handle, but we got along beauti-

fully. Of course, they were wondering about doing all this for God and country, and I said, 'Well, part of it, yes, but the big part of it was just doing our thing like you guys are. The only difference is we weren't as smart as you are today because we didn't have the communication you have at your fingertips. But we did get paid for our adrenalin flow. You guys don't get paid for it; in fact, you have to pay: the insurance on your cars has tripled and you get out and endanger your lives on the highways to get your adrenalin going. You can get

killed and hurt, and you do.' "

Pappy Boyington is a passionate man. His voice can rise to a shout when he is making an important point or recalling a particularly exhilarating or trying event, and fall to a growling whisper during less emotional conversation. Now 65 years old, his face is tanned and leathery, the many lines and cracks investing it with character and betraying years of flying into the bright sun. He is warm and friendly, admires honesty and forthrightness, and has an avowed distaste for naivete,

injustice, and guile. He looks you squarely in the eye and speaks straight from the shoulder. You always know where you stand with Pappy, and you can count on getting a fair shake.

The name "Pappy" was given to him by his Black Sheep, who hold reunions periodically, although they are "all grandfathers now." Actually, "Pappy" evolved from "Grandpappy," a monicker he received because he was in his early thirties during the war, while most of his men were a full ten years younger.



Pappy Boyington and his Black Sheep Squadron on Vella Lavella, in the Solomon Islands, 1943. Pappy is third from right on the bottom row.



Maj. Gregory "Pappy" Boyington before taking off on one of the scores of missions he would lead from his base at Vella Lavella. Tied with Joe Foss as the top Marine Corps ace, he was discharged from the Marines with the rank of colonel.

Pappy took care of his men with a natural sensitivity that a great leader must have. "With this gang of pilots, it was just like a doctor. I didn't have to touch them, I just noticed this one guy was losing his rough sense of humor and I knew something was bothering him. So without the rest of the pilots knowing, I would engineer this chap into one of the non-flying jobs, because there were a number of

those, like making out the schedules, keeping track of the engineering, planes, and readiness, and when you would assign this at random, if the boy wanted to fly, he just bitched and beefed constantly. They all wanted to fly; they didn't want to do anything else. But I could go up to a guy like that and say, 'Hey, would you give me a hand? I'm in desperate shape; I've got to have *somebody* who will do

this job. Will you take it on for a week or so?' That way, he'd take the job and I could tell when he was ready to go again, but I didn't have to involve the whole squadron. Otherwise, you know, people would say, 'What's the matter with so-and-so—lose his guts or something?' And it isn't a case of that. It may be reflected as such, but something is bugging the guy, and not only is he dangerous to himself, but to whoever is counting on him."

Pappy and his Black Sheep lived daily with the reality of sudden death. "We were actually closer than most people in any organization," he recalls, "so a loss was more meaningful than somebody in your golf club or Elks or whatever organization you belonged to. However, we were all geared so that we knew that not only *could* this happen, but that it *would* happen to a few of us, so we were prepared for it. See, if someone gets a heart attack here—well, gee, whiz—you weren't counting on that; I mean, all of a sudden, he's gone. But there you knew it could happen any day, any mission, any flight. Now, the only thing that ran through your mind if you were what you call 'with the thing' is that you were sorry it had to happen to anybody, let alone a good guy—a good friend—but you were glad it wasn't yourself. This may seem awfully selfish, but that's the way the good Lord, or whoever made all these pieces of humanity that float around on this earth, works."

That rough sense of humor that Pappy speaks of was an important emotional release for the men, and when the idea for the television series *Baa Baa Black Sheep* was being incubated, he insisted that this rough sense of humor be preserved in order to lend authenticity to the series. He had several other "musts" before he would allow Universal Studios to make a pilot film based on his 1957 best seller. He knew a pilot film was a

gamble in the best of times, that very few are ever made into series, and always having been "an odds man," he laid down certain conditions which he thought would increase the pilot show's odds of becoming a series. Apparently, it worked.

Another condition he insisted on concerned the music. "There would be no military music, no rat-a-tat-tat of the drum," says Pappy, "which is usually thrown in anything that has anything to do with war, either remotely or actually. I said, 'High adventure music throughout.'" Then Boyington was retained as technical adviser to the show, a position he still holds, although his ongoing role is somewhat reduced now that the show is off the ground. He checks the scripts for authenticity, making certain that the writers—some of whom weren't even born when the Black Sheep were busy shooting down Japanese planes in the South Pacific—don't slip any anachronistic or technically incorrect language into the dialogue. Sometimes he finds an expression that couldn't be more than ten years old, and usually an "Aw,

"... I was a competent old pro. I knew all the odds."



come on!" will get it removed from the script pronto.

When Pappy first arrived on the set, the Marine Corps had provided Universal with a lieutenant colonel and a gunnery sergeant as technical advisers, and when he and director Jackie Cooper (a captain in the Navy Reserve) took their first look at the cast, Cooper exploded. The Black Sheep were in strict regulation dress: starched, pressed khakis, long sleeved shirts, and neckties. "Good Lord, what's going on here?" Cooper snapped impatiently at the Marines. "Don't you people know they did their own laundry? They wouldn't look like this!" Pointing at a young actor, he ordered, "You. If you're going to be in khaki, go over to Property and have them cut off the sleeves of that khaki shirt. And have them cut off the legs of the trousers—and have them do it all jagged. And then smear a little oil on. And there's something else: get some glycerine or something that looks like sweat, and put that on the armpits and down the middle of the back. It's hot and sticky!" Cooper ordered everyone to makeup to get a three day beard and had all the uniforms soiled, and authenticity in costuming was somewhat assured. In the South Pacific, Pappy and his boys rarely shaved because they suffered from prickly heat, and they had to cut their own hair. So several flyers, most notably Joe Foss, the other famous Marine Corps ace, sported long hair, beards, and Fu Manchu moustaches years before any of that became fashionable.

The only real liberties the writers were given concerned the addition of women to the story—there were no nurses on the front lines—and the renaming of geographical locations. You won't find Vella Lacava or Espiritu Marcos on the map, but you will find Vella Lavella and Espiritu Santo, both islands in the Solomon



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group, which also includes Guadalcanal and Bougainville. The fictitious names allow the writers to write the scripts without having to consider geography or the speeds and ranges of the Corsairs the Black Sheep flew.

The plots are all based on real situations and events, although Pappy's squadron was much larger than its television counterpart. But a cast as large as the real Black Sheep squadron would be unworkable for television.

The best way to find what the real Pappy Boyington was like is to watch Robert Conrad play him. They are kindred spirits, and Pappy couldn't be happier with the choice. "I think Robert Conrad is probably the best selection of anyone around," he says happily. "By nature he is a very aggressive, feisty guy—and quite athletic. He likes to win—that is almost a must with Robert—and he is a better actor than most people give him credit for. In fact, I think he's a good actor, and I think he's ideal for the part."

Pappy is no newcomer to televi-



"... they didn't care whether I broke the record, tied it, or got killed in the attempt."

sion. In 1960 and 1961, he hosted and narrated a syndicated show called *Danger Zone*, and he got to know the medium pretty well. So he has a good sense of what will and will not play to the public. *Baa Baa Black Sheep* was picked up by NBC before the pilot was completed. Normally a series will have several episodes done before the season begins, but *Baa Baa Black Sheep* only had a few scripts written. The flying sequences couldn't be shot during one week for all the episodes, as is the normal practice, because the scripts weren't even ready. So the show became a costly project, each episode being filmed in its entirety before the shooting began on any other segment. To top it off, *Baa Baa Black Sheep* was scheduled opposite *Happy Days* and *LaVerne and Shirley*, two of the most popular shows on television, and it was cancelled after one year.

This fall, however, Pappy returned to the air with the series renamed *Black Sheep Squadron*, getting a second chance thanks in part to the abysmal fare offered by the networks for the 1978 season. Actually, had they not

been abruptly rushed onto the air by NBC last year, this would have been the show's first year. The new name was what Pappy wanted all along, because it definitely limits the series to the time he spent in the South Pacific. His book, also entitled *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, contains the memoirs of his days with the Flying Tigers and the time he spent as a Japanese prisoner of war, and many people expected the series to include those experiences. Besides, there is no mistaking the title *Black Sheep Squadron* for a kiddie show, but *Baa Baa Black Sheep*—that's another story.

Pappy was shot down in January 1944 after shooting down his 28th Japanese plane. He was under tremendous pressure to break Eddie Rickenbacker's record of 26 before his combat tour ended, and flew tirelessly just to get the chance to break it before his time ran out. On one mission, he even put a pinch of tobacco in each eye to make his eyes sting so he wouldn't fall asleep. War correspondents descended on him, creating an annoyance on top of the already heavy pressure.

"They let war correspondents, who were nothing but newspaper men, run all around there," Pappy complains. "My God, they would meet you coming out of the bathroom or go in and sit down on one of the extra stools and ask you questions like, 'Do you think you can beat the record?' and 'When is it going to happen, Pappy?' You'd go to breakfast, lunch, and dinner and get the same story. That's when I told a guy, 'If I break it, I'll tell you, and in the meantime, just leave me alone.' But he didn't, he popped up; so I slammed this—I just meant to hit the table for emphasis, but I hit the edge of my plate and flipped my whole dinner right in his face.

"But they go overboard. You see, actually they didn't care whether I

broke the record, tied it, or got killed in the attempt; any one of the three would have made a story that they would love to write and print. The one they wrote was that I tied the record and it was in error."

Pappy and George Ashmun, one of the Black Sheep, were flying with a group of inexperienced pilots from another unit. Pappy set a lone Japanese plane on fire to tie Rickenbacker and then he and Ashmun dove below the clouds, where they "got milling around with the whole Japanese navy." The rest of the pilots, being inexperienced, didn't follow them down. Ashmun was killed and Pappy went into the water and was



picked up by a Japanese submarine. It was not known until after the war that he had shot down two more planes before he was hit.

He remained a Japanese POW for the remainder of the war, surviving despite lack of food and medical attention to some severe wounds, including a shattered ankle. The Japanese considered him a special prisoner and not a regular prisoner of war, and never revealed that he had

been captured. Most Americans believed he had been killed until after the Japanese surrendered, when his fellow prisoners painted the roof of one of the prison camp buildings with the words PAPPY BOYINGTON HERE for Allied planes to see.

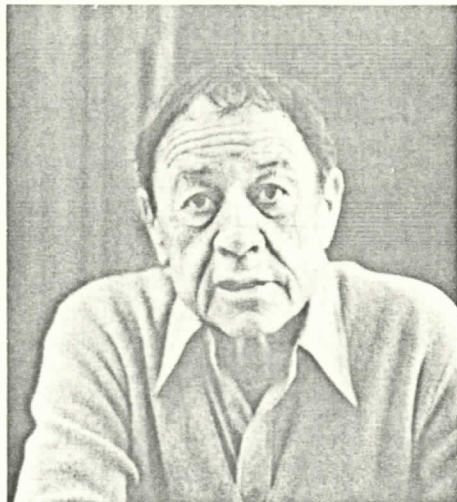
Despite the poor diet, the weeks spent with five other naked men in a tiny sweatbox with no sanitary facilities, and the cruelty sometimes inflicted by their captors, Pappy never doubted that he would survive. He knew that if the Allies had to invade Japan several prisoners would not survive, but he would not be among them.

He has a great respect for the Japanese people, and can cite several instances of extremely kind treatment he received from many Japanese. Even when the prisoners went into the town to clean up the rubble left behind by American bombs, some Japanese risked punishment by sharing their limited food and water with them. And by working in the prison kitchen, he became great friends with an old Japanese woman who allowed him to steal bits of food for himself and his fellow prisoners. He became "the best kleptomaniac around," and his weight shot up from 110 pounds to 190.

"I knew really nothing concrete about the Japanese until I became a prisoner of war," he remembers "I knew what kind of flyers they were, and they were good to terrific, but I didn't buy all the propaganda that was given out by my own country.

"I found them, as a whole, to be a very honest group of people, more so than any other special group of people that I have ever run into, and this is an eye-opener. Of course, this was completely foreign to the propaganda; in other words, they were sneaky, liars, and facetiously polite, which is not true. In fact, I finally ran into the

guy who shot me down. He was an eighteen year old kid at the time, a petty officer third class. He said, 'Well, I'm awfully sorry,' and I said, 'Don't be, Mike. My God, we're the lucky ones; we're here.' I am sure he



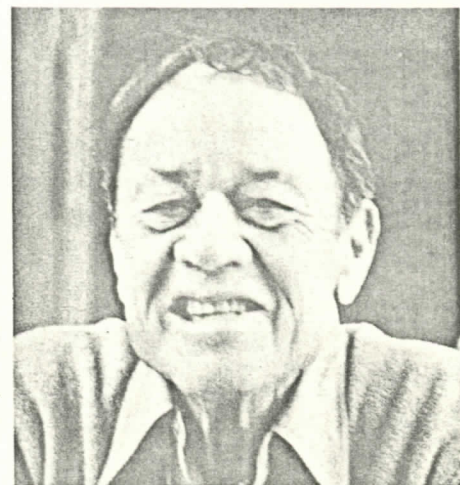
"Alcohol is part of this life, but I had to realize that it can't be a part of my life, or I won't have a life."

was sincere about being sorry, but it was all a part of the big package. There was nothing to be sorry about; in fact, we had everything in the world to be thankful for and we've become very good friends."

Pappy doesn't believe the Japanese received a fair shake at the war crimes trials, when people were tried en masse. "The way we treated them was entirely foreign to the way this country was started and is still conducted. Each individual has his own rights, and the very basis of our country is that we are going to see to it that he gets these," he says. "And yet, we turn around and to expedite things because of the mood we have blanket trials. There may have been half a dozen charges, and sometimes 50 or 60 people accused. Maybe one, two, or three may have been guilty of all six charges, while it may have been alleged that some had something to

do with one of these things, but they are all tried at once. Now this is grossly unfair." Pappy tried to help a Japanese war crimes defendant who was kind to Americans by sending a sworn affidavit to his trail.

Life wasn't all heroics for Pappy Boyington. Before, during, and after the war he fought a losing battle against alcoholism, a battle he finally did win. He talks about his alcoholism openly: "I didn't know that word 'alcoholic' way back when, but I knew there was something different about me than the average guy, because I liked the effects of alcohol, but I really didn't drink like what you would call a normal person. I would tell myself that I was going to this social function and I was just going to have a couple of drinks like everybody else. A lot of times I would, but that didn't seem comfortable to me. If I took a drink I wanted enough to really get with it, and of course, when that happened I had absolutely no program for that evening. I could be in a real jovial mood, but I couldn't plan this ahead of time; or God darn it, I could be sarcastic and mean. I



"I asked, 'Where did you get that thing?' And one of the kids said, 'We found it in a junk shop downtown.'"

wouldn't know until the following day, when somebody, usually slightly senior to me, would unfold the evening to me."

But what really riled Pappy was the efforts of people who were determined to teach him how to drink. "A lot of times," he recalls angrily, "I would be standing in front of someone's desk and he would say, 'Well, why don't you just have a couple of drinks. Learn to drink,' and this just curdled me. Boy, if those guys were good at reading eyes—which they weren't—they would have seen murder in them. 'Yeah, drink like a man, like I do,'" he paraphrases. "And I just thought while standing there, 'Why you darned so and so! There isn't anything in this world I can't beat you at: wrestling, boxing, flying' (and a few vulgar things that I won't mention) 'but there is only one damned thing you can do that I can't, and that's drink socially.'

"I'm no social drinker. I tried to be, but I never was from the very start. I never had a drink until I went into the service, and then it was a part of the calling system. You leave so many calling cards, depending on what the family is, the ages of the family members, and whether there were any visiting aunts or uncles, and oh, brother! I could never get that straight. And then you have one drink when you call to a new duty station and if they obviously want you to hang around awhile, you have two, but never any more. I didn't even want one, but if I did have one, hell's bells! They'd be driving me home at about four in the morning.

"But that's nothing to be ashamed of," according to Pappy. "If a guy develops diabetes it is nothing to be ashamed of. It's just that if you do have it and there's a way to take care of it, then that is the only thing you should be concerned with. If you

have to take insulin, you take insulin; if you have to lay off booze, you lay off booze. Alcohol is a part of this life, but I had to realize that it can't be a part of my life, or I won't have a life."

Boyington was initiated into Lambda Chi Alpha by Alpha-Psi Zeta at the University of Washington in 1945—fifteen years after he first pledged. He was a varsity wrestler who started college as an art major and graduated in aeronautical engineering. "I went to school when the depression was on," he recalls. "I started out as a pledge and became a perennial pledge because I didn't have enough money to join. I lived at home in Seattle and I was still welcome as hell there [at the chapter house], but finally I just ceased to go there because it was embarrassing to me not being able to dig up the money to join."

But after the war, when Pappy returned to his hometown on a bond tour drive, his chapter contacted him and he spent his only free night being initiated at the Edmund Meany Hotel near campus. "They went through the process of making me a member and one of the kids bought me a Lambda Chi pin. I said, 'Gee, in my time nobody had enough money where they could buy their own pin, let alone one for some other joker.' I wound up over at the house and there was a big head and shoulders picture of me hanging right at the top of the stairs on the second floor." He was obviously astonished. "I asked 'Where did you get that thing?' and one of the kids said, 'We found it in a junk shop downtown.'" He laughs as he relates that story, which merely serves to illustrate his view of the fleeting glory of being a "hero."

He speaks highly of his experience with Lambda Chi and has a fishing buddy in the person of Lambda Chi Alpha's legendary Jimmy Doolittle.

And one of his fellow Flying Tigers, Duke Hedman, is also a Lambda Chi.

On the occasion of his initiation, Pappy told his new brothers, "I have always hoped that some day I could return to my Fraternity and become a member. I know I thought of it many times while a prisoner of the Japs. I appreciate more than I can tell you what you fellows have done for me tonight. I will always keep this night among my memories, and I will do my best to live up to the creed of Lambda Chi Alpha and help the Fraternity whenever and wherever I can. This is the happiest moment I have had in many years."

Pappy Boyington and his Black Sheep were legendary for their war record, their drinking and carousing, and their independence in skirting military structure and fighting the war their way. The wildness was a part of life at war, and that is really behind him now. At 65—"a legitimate senior citizen"—Pappy plays golf whenever he can, speaks professionally, works on the television series, and still loves to fly. His wife accompanies him on most trips and his children are all grown.

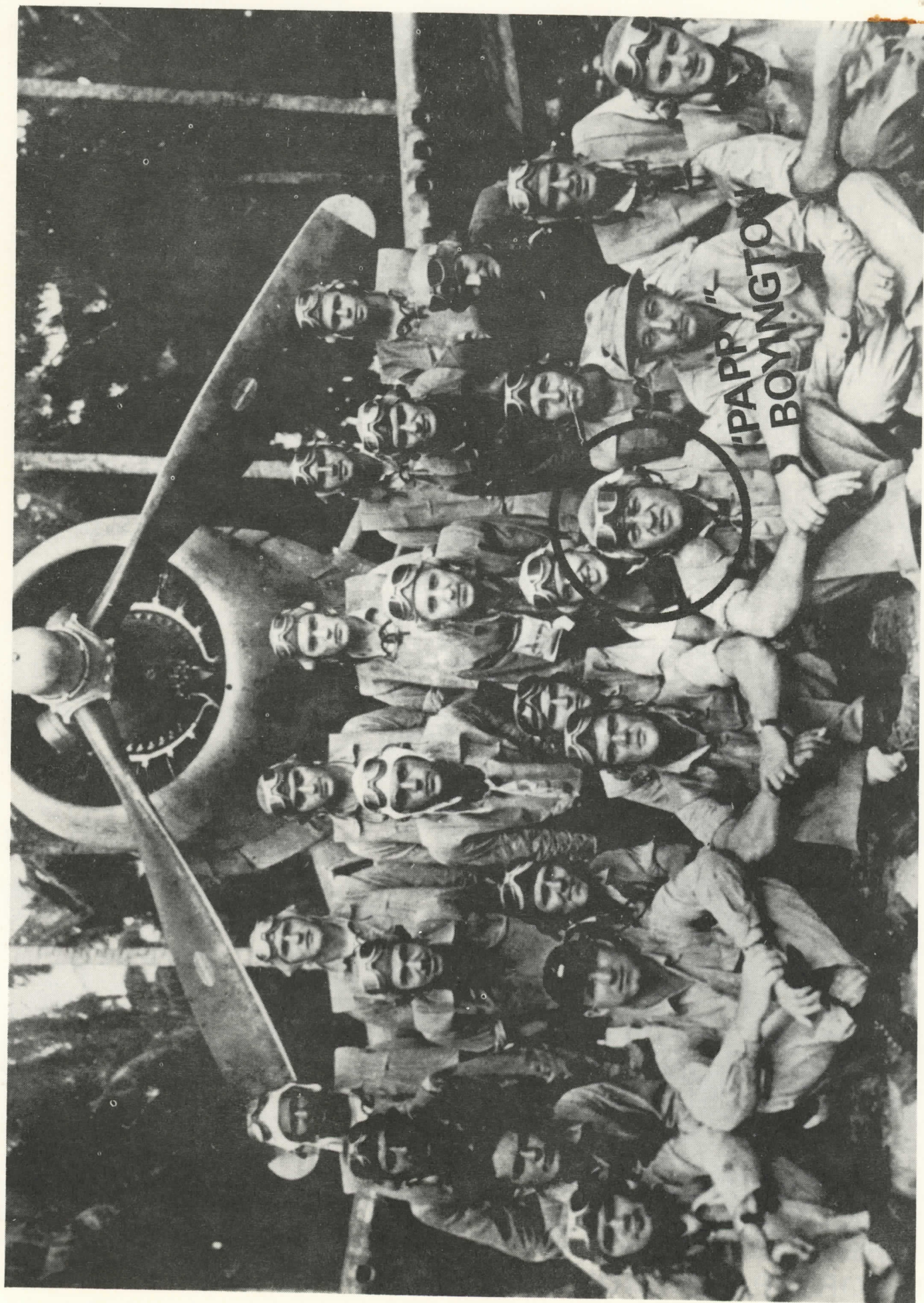
Toughness, discipline, and competitiveness made Pappy a great flyer. They helped him survive a Japanese prisoner of war camp. They helped him defeat alcoholism. But don't call him a hero. You won't find his Congressional Medal of Honor displayed anywhere: there were lots of heroes who were never recognized, and lots of people whose recognition wasn't justified, so Pappy would rather not bask in the limelight.

He was a competent old pro doing his job and a sensitive, pragmatic leader. He's also an engineer, a painter of desert landscapes, a speaker, a television pro, a golfer, and a writer. And what he does, he does well.



GREGORY "PAPPY" BOYINGTON - COLONEL, U.S.M.C.(RET.)

World War II Marine air ace and commander of original Black Sheep squadron upon whose war adventures NBC-TV's "Black Sheep Squadron" is based.



ORIGINAL "BLACK SHEEP" SQUADRON WORLD WAR II PHOTO