

By Cdr. Peter B. Mersky, USNR (Ret.)

Gamble, Bruce. *Black Sheep One, the Life of Gregory "Pappy" Boyington*. Presidio Press, 505 B San Marin Dr., Suite 160, Novato, CA 94945-1340. 2000. 460 pp. Ill. \$29.95.

One of the enduring legends of the Pacific War, Pappy Boyington lived a life crammed with enough highs and lows for an entire squadron of aces. However, much of what was written in magazines and histories, including his autobiography in 1958, alternated between truth and wartime fiction. Bruce Gamble has fixed the problem with a highly readable, well-researched biography.

For me, a major resolution was Boyington's highly touted, but factually flawed record with the American Volunteer Group (AVG), Flying Tigers. Originally claiming 6.5 kills with Claire Chennault's AVG, Pappy's total was pared down to 3.5 mainly because of inadequate available AVG records. Gamble now has fine-tuned the matter to where it appears that Boyington scored 2 confirmed victories in P-40s, which would place him two kills behind Joe Foss as the leading Marine Corps ace. But this item is only a small part of Boyington's story.

His troubled childhood and early checkered career in the Marine Corps form a good portion of the first half of the book. Known mainly as "Rats," Boyington was admittedly a highly competent aviator, but his people skills left much to be desired. This failing followed him throughout his life. Whether working for a demanding CO like Chennault, or bucking tough Marine brass in the Pacific, Boyington could always find trouble outside of the cockpit.

Receiving the Medal of Honor in absentia, while he was a prisoner of war, he returned to have President Harry Truman place the blue ribbon around his neck as a lieutenant colonel. But having the nation's highest military award—plus the Navy's highest award, the Navy Cross—and the worship of hundreds of thousands of his countrymen was not enough for the troubled ace. Pappy sank into the despair of alcoholism, and he spent the rest of his life trying to find stability and reward.

Struggling with family problems before and after the war, as well as dealing with his larger-than-life image, which he had cultivated, Boyington found little solace in his status as a Marine hero. He was fond of saying, "Show me a hero, and I'll show you a bum." In fact, this cynical quote became something of a heraldic motto. This book leaves the reader with a new appreciation of Boyington as a man and fighter pilot. Only someone as tough as Boyington could have lived that life.

Bruce Gamble has written what should be the last word on Pappy. Combined with Marine Fighter Squadron

214 intelligence officer Frank Walton's 1986 squadron biography, *Once They Were Eagles*, we now have a detailed picture of one of America's most colorful combat aviators and the squadron he led.

Bruning, John R. *Crimson Sky: The Air Battle for Korea*. Brassey's Inc., 22841 Quicksilver Dr., Dulles, VA 20166. 2000. 232 pp. Ill. \$18.95.

An excellent overview of the air war in Korea, 1950–1953, *Crimson Sky* includes a good description of the problems and successes of U.S. aviators and flight crews during this first "hot war" of the Cold War. Although many books on Korean air ops tend to ignore or gloss over Naval Aviation's role, the Navy and Marine Corps are well served in the author's narrative. He has some great stories to tell.

Lengthy chapters on Fighter Squadron 53 and Attack Squadron 195 describe early war sorties as well as a famous dam-busting mission. Tom Hudner's Medal of Honor flight in which he tried to save squadron mate Jesse Brown is also included.

Naturally, the war against Communist MiGs is a main theme of the book, and John Bruning is one of the first authors to include newly revealed details of Soviet involvement. Russian fighter pilots served not just as advisors, but as active participants in the air war, including some of the most intense combats of 1951 and 1952. American crews always believed they were facing more capable aviators in the MiGs than newly trained North Korean and Chinese fliers. The broadcast of rapid-fire Russian overheard by listening posts also lent credence to the rumors that the MiG drivers from over the Yalu were Soviet.

There have been many books and articles on the Korean War, especially on the air war, particularly in this period of 50-year anniversaries. But the author's goal of reminding the public just how intense the fighting was and how much everyone who fought suffered is a worthy one.

This is not a flashy book. The photos are sufficient in quality and subject, but not extraordinary, and the layout and production are routine. It's the narrative that should be commended. Well written, appreciative without being maudlin, the description is first rate. It covers every aspect of the air war, from the first ground-attack missions following the Communist invasion of South Korea through the strategic bombing campaign using USAF B-29s, and the occasional but intense Communist efforts to wrest control of the air from United Nations forces.

*Crimson Sky* is definitely a must read.