

Title - Misfits or Aces: The Story of the Black Sheep Squadron in World War II

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the tactics, strategies and success rate of the unit known as VMF-214 the Black Sheep Squadron. For a unit that was only in operation approximately five months the number of pilots that earned the “Ace” status is impressive. What was it that made this particular unit so cohesive and successful? The answer to this question lies within the leadership of the squadron. Major Gregory “Pappy” Boyington was a fearless pilot, having enlisted in the Marines after college to be a pilot, he eventually would leave to join Colonel Claire Chennault and his American Volunteer Group known as the Flying Tigers in China. Boyington would not remain with the Flying Tigers for long leaving to return to the Marines. It was under Chennault’s unit that he developed his ideas of what made a successful pilot during combat. Utilizing Unit Histories, and After Action Reports assessments can be made to understand better the tactics and strategies employed by Boyington when training and preparing his men for combat action.

Major Boyington was a colorful but fearless leader; he knew when to be serious and like most military combat pilots knew how to let loose with the men. By looking at the notes of his Intelligence Officer, it becomes evident that Boyington believed that fighter aircraft and pilots

were designed for fighting. If contact with the enemy was not made during the mission, then someone was not doing their job. It is this attitude the men took to the skies; it contributes to why the men of the Black Sheep Squadron were highly decorated and skilled pilots.