

The Making of a Legend ©2002

By Dick Culver

The following newspaper clippings tell the story of one of the greats of Marine Corps Sniping from Korea, TSgt. John Boitnott. The scenario is Korea in 1952 when the mobile war had taken on something faintly reminiscent of the trench warfare of WWI. Essentially the Chinese Reds were on one side of the hill masses, and the Marines on the other. The Panmunjom peace talks were in session, and the Marines had settled down for what amounted to a war of attrition. Trench lines, and bunkers provided



**John Boitnott-1/3/5 Korea 1952
9 Shots-9-kills-900 yards**

protection from small arms fire punctuated with mortars and artillery. The 3rd Battalion of the 5th Regiment was fighting daily battles of their own against the CCF, and small arms exchanges were constant and often deadly. Finally

tired of taking incoming small arms fire, the Regiment put out a call for all talented shooters in their number. One of these was SSgt. John Boitnott, who had been awarded a Distinguished Marksman's Badge in 1950. Here was a man worthy of giving the CCF better than they sent. After being called back to the Regimental Headquarters and sighting in a batch of sniping rifles recently acquired by the 5th Marines, the newly formed Sniper Group/Platoons moved back into the lines.



TSgt. J. Boitnott and Pfc. Friday snipers are checking the score - nine rounds, nine dead Reds

SSgt. Boitnott shortly had a Communist bullet ricochet off of his helmet, and began to plot his revenge! He was armed with an Army M1C Sniper Rifle with an M82 scope attached using a Griffin & Howe Mount. While not in a league with our Modern M40A1s, the glass definitely gave an edge to a man who was a trained team shooter. After removing the flash hider to keep it from destroying the accuracy of the M1C by rattling around on the end of the barrel, he carefully watched the ridgeline for any sign of the pesky Commie assailant, but to no immediate avail. He was serving as a Platoon Sergeant with Item

Company 3/5 and went back to his platoon searching for a "designated decoy!" Almost immediately he had a volunteer, a certain Pfc. M. Friday who was to act as his observer/spotter. This however was not to work like a normal scout-sniper team, Boitnott, an old hunter, intended to use his man Friday as a decoy to draw enemy fire (perhaps more like a duck in a shooting gallery). Friday would walk up and down in front of Boitnott's position attempting to draw fire from their assailants. He did not have long to wait. A tell-tale puff of smoke followed by the sound of a ricocheting projectile came from across the way. The hapless Chink had given his position away. Boitnott closely watching Friday, caught a glimpse of muzzle smoke across the hill mass. Carefully lining up the scope of his new sniper rifle, Boitnott squeezed the trigger and the shooter from the opposing hill mass went down. A pair of dividers from the S-2 Shop measured the distance on the map as approximately 900-yards! Hummm... Now this was beginning to be fun! John continued to utilize his shooting gallery technique over the next few days until a couple of reporters caught wind of his success and came down for a photo-op. In true "one shot, one kill" tradition, John bagged nine Commies with nine shots at 900+-yards with no casualties. We have superior equipment now, but nine first shot kills at 900-yards is mighty fine shooting with ANY rifle. The brass at Division Headquarters soon heard of their modern day Alvin York and came out to see for themselves. Upon witnessing the use of a live decoy, they visibly blanched, thinking no doubt of the letter that they might have to write home to the decoy's family. "Dear Mrs. Friday, today your son bravely gave his life for his Country and his Corps while acting as a shooting gallery decoy for our ace sniper, SSgt. John Boitnott!" Uppsss... While they had to smile at Boitnott's somewhat unorthodox technique, they decided that Pfc. Friday was stretching his luck as far as anyone should be allowed. John's prowess with the M-1 Rifle hit the front pages all over the country. A photo taken by the magazine covering the story resulted in one of the most famous of Marine Corps Sniper images ever taken, and secured SSgt. Boitnott a permanent place in the gallery of Marine Corps Snipers.

SSgt. Boitnott was meritoriously promoted to TSgt. (the equivalent of Gunnery Sergeant prior to the service-wide reorganization of the rank structure from seven pay grades to nine in 1958/1959). SSgt. Boitnott was transferred back to the 2nd Marine Division as chief investigator with the Provost Marshal's office. He continued his career until retirement as a MGySgt. in the 1969 holding the billet as Head of Security for the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the Pentagon.

Korea Hero Makes TSgt. Meritoriously

A sharpshooting marine who played for keeps with the Chinese Peds while using an old hunting bluff was meritoriously promoted to technical sergeant at 2nd Division Hq. Bn. last week.

TSgt. John E. Boitnott, now serving as chief investigator with the Division Provost Marshal's office, was a platoon sergeant with the Fifth Marines in Korea when his exploits with an M-1 hit front pages all over the country.

Using a volunteer from his platoon as a decoy, Boitnott used his shooting eye to pick off Red snipers who fell prey to the old turkey hunting trick and raised above their parapets for pot shots at the running TSgt. BOITNOTT marine.



This deadly little game progressed for several days before authorities put a stopper on things. By that time, however, Boitnott and his decoy had made news.

His meritorious promotion came as a result of outstanding service since being assigned to his present duties with the Division provost marshal.

MGySgt. John Boitnett (USMC Ret.) is living in the Jacksonville, Florida area with his wife, hale and hearty at 80-years old. He is still very sharp mentally and enjoys talking about his willing decoy's heroism and the satisfaction of reducing the number of pesky Red Chinese along the demarcation line. The peace talks seemed destined to linger through eternity at Panmunjom. Even small victories made life more worthwhile for the Marines, and kept the Chinks in a constant state of anticipation awaiting the inevitable magic bullet to cancel their birth certificates. Life is sometimes good!

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