



# IN HAITI

*When he died in 1974 at the age of 84, VADM Joel T. Boone's career in the Navy Medical Department was already legendary. Commissioned a lieutenant junior grade in 1914, he eventually progressed through the ranks to vice admiral. Dr. Boone saw it all and did it all during his 36 years active duty, retiring as the most decorated Navy medical officer in history. As Battalion and Regimental Surgeon, 6th Marine Regiment, and later as Assistant Division Surgeon of the 2d Army Division, American Expeditionary Forces, Dr. Boone earned the Medal of Honor and numerous other awards.*

*After the war he served as White House physician to Presidents Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover. During World War II, he was 3d Fleet Medical Officer on ADM William F. Halsey's staff, and was one of three officers selected to liberate Allied POW camps in Japan even before military occupation of that nation began. On 14 September 1945 he stood on USS Missouri's deck representing the Navy Medical Department for the surrender ceremonies.*

*It all began with LTJG Boone's deployment to Haiti in 1915 with a Marine artillery battalion. The following excerpt from his unpublished memoirs, edited by his son-in-law, Milton F. Heller, Jr., chronicles this unusual campaign.*

*— Jan K. Herman*

In August 1915, only 14 months after having been commissioned a lieutenant junior grade in the Navy Medical Corps, I was on my way to Haiti with a Marine Corps artillery battalion.

The Marines were expected to put an end to the anarchy in that Caribbean country and prevent Germany from gaining a foothold there in defiance of the Monroe Doctrine. My first view of Haiti, from the deck of USS *Tennessee*, was startlingly magnificent. I was struck by the clarity of sapphire blue sea and towering mountains that extended from a high layer of fleecy clouds down through deep blue, clear skies, and ending almost at the water's edge. However, my enchantment with Haiti's beauty was short lived. The sights in Port-au-Prince, where we landed, were indescribably horrible: filth, congestion, and poverty everywhere. Adults and children alike relieved themselves on the sidewalks, gutters, streets, and even amidst raw produce for sale in the marketplaces, which looked like junkyards. Swarms of flies and other insects infested the excrement and food.

My first duties in Port-au-Prince and environs were to hold sick call for the Marines and the native police and prisoners. I was also to try introducing rudimentary sanitation to the city. Medical and surgical facilities in the local hospitals were crude. When I was called upon to amputate the leg of a boy whose foot had been crushed under a train wheel, I had to operate on a wooden table, with a kerosene lamp for illumination and chloroform as an anesthetic.

After only a few weeks in Port-au-Prince, I was transferred to the

1st Regiment of Marines at Cap Haitien, which lies across the northern peninsula from Port-au-Prince. The native Caco outlaws had been attacking the Marines in this area. Soon after arriving, I began my first field trip, a 5-day expedition with 50 enlisted Marines and several officers. This was my first introduction to sleeping on the ground with only a rock for a pillow and the heavens for protection. We arose in the morning wringing wet from the night's dew and found ourselves covered with ants and mosquitoes that seemed as large as horseflies.

Just a week later I rejoined the artillery battalion (13th company) at Grande Rivière, a hamlet 15 miles inland from Cap Haitien. From there I participated in a number of forays into the countryside. My company's instructions were to disarm the Cacos and destroy their fortifications, many of which could be approached only over frightfully twisting and precipitous trails. Cacos were like mosquitoes hidden away in thick vegetation or trees. In bare feet they would approach us without making a sound. As they made skilled use of the machete in decapitating their victims.

Maintaining adequate sanitary conditions at Grande Rivière proved to be quite a challenge. Latrines were built and burned out daily with crude oil. We constructed an incinerator in which garbage and manure were burned with oil, producing a very hot fire. Buildings were scrubbed with chlorine of mercury and then whitewashed. We dispensed prophylactic quinine to the officers and men each evening as protection against malaria.

As the medical officer attached



## Boone in Haiti, 1915

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to CAPT Campbell's 13th Company of Marines, I was in on the battles for three of the Cacos' major strongholds, Fort Rivière, Fort Capois, and Fort Berthol.

The taking of Fort Rivière, high in the mountains, was a principal military objective, and it proved most difficult, requiring two separate attacks. Built by Napoleon's army before 1800, this fort, with its thick rock walls, had stood overgrown and unused for over a century until it was occupied by the Cacos.

The first major attack on Fort Rivière took place on 29 October 1915. The force consisted of 133 Marines and a pack train of 20 mules and 12 horses. We marched and fought continuously for 21 1/2 hours, from 4 a.m. to 1:30 a.m. the next day. The forest was perched atop a 4,000-foot ridge and could be approached only by a 2-foot wide trail that rose almost perpendicularly through a deep canyon. Under fire from the Cacos, who held five mountain peaks, the Marines suffered many casualties. The heat, altitude, and severity of the climb also took its toll. I prodded the men along with a combination of encouragement and cursing. Finally, by

\*This excerpted memoir was published in *Navy Medicine Magazine*, May-June 1987.

pushing on and bringing machine guns into action, the Marines succeeded in scaling the highest peak and driving the Cacos from the fortifications. After going on to capture Fort Capois on 5 November and Fort Berthol on 8 November, with the help of a detachment of Marines and a company of bluejackets from USS *Connecticut*, our attention turned once again to Fort Rivière. Unfortunately, the troops had failed to destroy the fort after the prior attack, and the Cacos occupied it once more.

The second attack took place on 17 November and proved to be the most difficult and spectacular action in which the Marine Corps had participated since the Civil War. The attack was to be made from four directions, beginning simultaneously at 8 a.m. MAJ Smedley Butler's 5th Company began firing from west of the mountain range 15 minutes before the appointed time. Soon thereafter, the other columns opened up and, with all approaches and apparent means of escape for the Cacos covered, our forces charged the fort.

MAJ Butler and his troops approached over an open plain, while the 13th Company had to go down from one mountain into a deep ravine and then up a 45-degree hill directly beneath the fort, thereby exposing ourselves to heavy fire.

As our machine guns swept the fort from the mountain we had descended, we spread out in a skirmish line and yelled as we climbed as fast as we could up the hill.

When CAPT Campbell saw the Cacos coming through a broken place in the fort's wall and jumping into a dried-up moat, and that his lieutenants were already busy, he ordered me to take some men and go after them.



I took six Marines, made a right flank movement with them, and headed toward the hole in the wall. The climb was so steep and the men so exhausted that they wanted to stop and rest. My cursing and yelling so surprised them that they kept moving with vigor. As we scrambled along, the Cacos continued to jump from the ramparts. I was anxious that our little group should be the first to enter the fort. I pushed two men into the moat and up against the wall. From an embankment they shot several Cacos as they fell over the wall.

We were able to get one of our boys onto the wall by having him stand on a rifle held by three of us. Once up, he reached down, and with the help of a rifle, pulled each of us atop the rampart. From there, we jumped into the fort itself as we shouted out, "13th Company," so our own troops would not mistake us for the enemy.

The men with me started a hand-to-hand encounter with the Cacos,

shooting, bayoneting, and smashing their skulls with rifle butts. Suddenly, we heard someone scream, "Who the hell are you?" It was MAJ Butler and his men of the 5th Company; we quickly identified ourselves. Our linkup with Butler raised a question as to who had entered the fort first, Butler and his 5th Company, or I and my contingent from the 13th Company? Butler and I did not agree on this point.

Soon after, the Marines and bluejackets entered the fort from all directions, and the battle was over in less than 20 minutes. Not one of our men suffered even the slightest wound, while we killed 50 Cacos. As ordered, I carried a .45 revolver in my hand for self-protection, but I am pleased to report I did not use it.

We were jubilant over the victory that marked the virtual end of Cacos resistance in this part of the country. For my part in the action at Fort Rivière, I received from Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels the first award of my naval

career—a Special Letter of Commendation—for being “cool under fire.”

Only a few weeks after the battle for Fort Rivière, I was ordered to duty in Port-au-Prince and from there on to Jèrèmie, due west of Port-au-Prince near the tip of the southern peninsula. The people of Haiti intrigued me. The mountain folks, who made no pretense of being married, practiced voodooism, and they would become hysterical, even maniacal, in their orgies.

They even sacrificed and ate babies.

I found graft to be rampant in Jèrèmie. In making my daily inspection of the prison, I learned that the jailer was extracting 50 cents from each prisoner due to be released. If the prisoner refused to pay up, he would be kept locked up, indefinitely. Judges, district attorneys, and political leaders were known to have been living on graft for years.

One of the advantages of being transferred to Jèrèmie was that my wife, Helen, could join me there. She was the first American white woman to come there to live and created a sensation among the natives.

During the 4 months we were in Jèrèmie, I was required, from time to time, to accompany the paymaster on trips into the countryside, by boat or horseback. These trips were not altogether pleasant as revealed by some random comments extracted from my diary: “The French serve too much wine for comfortable traveling....Paid the people and turned in after a rotten supper.... Had lunch with the Mayor—garlic and grease....Roads very rough and mountainous....Disgusted with that way of traveling....Mosquitoes very bad, interfering with my sleep.”

It was about 14 June 1916, a few

days after the most recent trip with the paymaster, that I came down with estivo-autumnal malaria, a very malignant form of the disease. I became desperately ill very quickly with a high fever, horrible headaches, body aches, and nausea. When the native doctor’s prescription that I drink a lot of rum failed to work, I was taken by a special tug to the field hospital in Port-au-Prince, where I arrived about 20 June. I have no recollection whatsoever of this journey.

In Port-au-Prince I was given a very large dose—I think they said 500 cc—of quinine solution, which resulted in a severe circulatory collapse. I remember lying semiconscious in the hospital as the cot seemed to slip out from under me and I floated off into space. I sensed that I was losing consciousness and probably dying when I heard the doctor, as he felt my pulse, say to the hospital corpsman, “My God! Get me camphorated oil immediately!”

Next I heard the corpsman say that they had no camphorated oil and the doctor respond excitedly:

“For God’s sake, get me some ether, bring me several hypodermics of ether! I want ...Boone’s dying! I can’t get his pulse at all now; I could a little bit ago.” I remember opening my eyes with great effort and saying, “Please do all you can for me,” before losing consciousness again. He gave me several hypodermic injections of ether which served to restore my circulation.

From Port-au-Prince I went to the hospital ship, USS *Solace*, while Helen, my bride of barely 2 years, was left to her own devices to make her way back to the United States. After extended treatment on board the *Solace*, I gradually regained an

appetite to sleep through the night. When the time came for Dr. Kennedy, the medical officer in command of the *Solace*, to report on my condition to the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, he wrote, “Return to duty in Haiti very doubtful.” Dr. Kennedy felt very strongly that I should have a complete rest and change of climate. I had been looking forward eagerly to an appointment as one of two medical officers to be assigned to the constabulary or peacekeeping force in Haiti, especially since Helen and I had an opportunity to sample a very pleasant life together in Jèrèmie.

Upon arriving home, I found that because of my malignant malarial illness the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery would not approve of my return to Haiti. To my regret, this proved to have been both the first and last time I was to visit that country.■