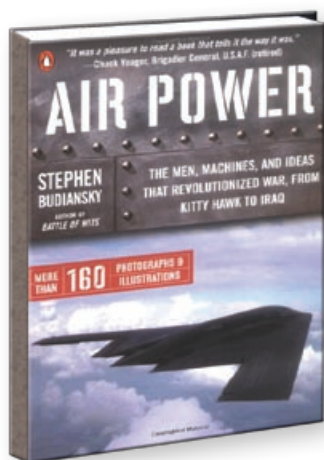


# BOOK REVIEWS



## AIR POWER: THE MEN, MACHINES AND IDEAS THAT REVOLUTIONIZED WAR, FROM KITTY HAWK TO IRAQ

BY STEPHEN BUDIANSKY

NEW YORK:  
PENGUIN BOOKS, 2004  
518 PAGES ISBN 014303474X

Review by  
Major Andrew B. Godefroy, CD, PhD

Despite the constant increasing utility of Wikipedia and other online searchable databases, every library requires a number of basic references to “bookend” its more detailed and perhaps obscure works. For students and scholars of air power, these likely include classic works by Boelcke, Trenchard, Douhet, Mitchell, Sikorsky, Slemon and even Boyd. Stephen Budiansky’s *Air Power*, a work that does not offer any new theories, attempts to deliver a concise overview of the evolution of air power from its earliest days to the present.

Attempting to cover a topic as broad as air power in a single volume is no small task, and accordingly, Budiansky is forced to hit the highlights while ignoring the less obvious or less well-known. The book is divided into four parts and addresses a wide range of topics, from strategic bombing to dogfighting and from naval aviation to precision munitions. Though slightly informative, the reader is too often told what is important but not why or what effect these developments had on the next stage of air power evolution. As well, one is quickly given the impression that only ideas related to tactics, targeting or technology truly drove air power evolution, and the book too often misses the importance of many other factors. Experimental test flight as well as sub-orbital and space

operations, to name but a few, barely receive mention or consideration.

The book falls into the typical trap formula of technology plus tactics equals air power. It makes no effort whatsoever to address the role of air forces across the entire spectrum of conflict, whether as a force of surveillance, coercion or even humanitarian intervention and relief. Though Budiansky obviously recognizes air forces as instruments of sovereignty and national will, he appears uninterested in exploring these subjects any further here. Thus, Budiansky’s vision of air power is quickly dumbed down into a discussion of targeting.

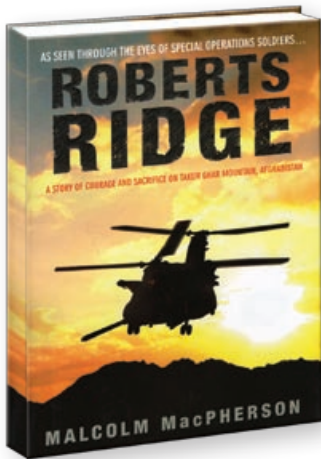
As with too many books in this genre, *Air Power* is predictably Anglo-American-centric, paying tiny courtesies to German, French and Italian thinkers while simply ignoring pretty much everyone else. While Middle-Eastern engagements such as the Bekaa Valley are emphasized, the author, for example, avoids the 1965/1970 Indo-Pakistan air wars, the Iran-Iraq tanker war of the 1980s and, rather surprisingly, even the 1982 Falkland Islands naval air war. As well, three-quarters of *Air Power* is devoted to the pre-1945 era, a period already well covered in many other books, giving only a small portion of the volume to

consider all the developments from 1945 to 2003. Given the dramatic advances of aerospace operations and technologies since the end of World War II, one would expect a new book to spend less time on older topics and give more attention to the jet age.

Readers looking for a basic reference should give *Air Power* a pass. As good as it claims to be, it is not really a book about air power as much a book about what was important to the development of United States Air Force air

tactics. Yet even here Budiansky's munitions fall well short of the target, and readers may want to look elsewhere for that handy desk reference. ■

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# ROBERTS RIDGE:

## A STORY OF COURAGE AND SACRIFICE ON TAKUR GHAR MOUNTAIN, AFGHANISTAN

BY MALCOLM MACPHERSON

NEW YORK:  
DELACORTE PRESS, 2005  
338 PAGES ISBN 0-553-80363-8

Review by  
Major William March, CD, MA

As my focus at work or interests change, I have a tendency to reread books in order to obtain a different perspective or to attempt to glean some additional knowledge about a particular subject. I first read *Roberts Ridge* a few years ago out of general interest, given Canada's involvement in Afghanistan. The book tells the story of a United States (US) special operations mission that went horribly wrong. What started out as a "routine," albeit hazardous, mission in support of a larger military campaign quickly developed a life of its own when the Chinook helicopter

tasked to deliver a special operations team to the top of Takur Ghar Mountain came under fire. In the subsequent confusion, Petty Officer 1st Class Neil C. Roberts—a navy Sea, Air, Land (SEAL) specialist—was thrown from the aircraft and subsequently died at the hands of the entrenched Taliban/al-Qaeda forces. *Roberts Ridge*, titled in his honour, is the account of the attempt to retrieve Petty Officer Roberts—first by his original team and then by a quick reaction force consisting primarily of US Army Rangers—and the ensuing fight at altitudes in excess of 10,000 feet.