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The Court-martial of Billy Mitchell – II

Lead: In the 1920s, the U.S. military was hampered by severe budget cutbacks and a debate on the future of the airplane. One persistent, prophetic, but on more than one occasion obnoxious voice in the debate was General William “Billy” Mitchell.

Intro: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts

Content: Billy Mitchell’s father and grandfather were congressmen. He thus grew up in the circles of power and expected people to listen

when he spoke, but his habit of going public with his ideas and tendency to browbeat his opponents diminished his influence with the Army. Mitchell's experience as head of Army air combat forces in Europe during World War I led him to conclude that the warplane was the key to victory in future conflicts and he went on a crusade to prove it. He was particularly adept at using the press to further his ideas. He arranged a series of highly-publicized tests in which his bombers spectacularly sank several surplus battleships thus proving their vulnerability and increasing obsolescence.

Mitchell's public campaign had

many supporters in and out of the military, but his style of advocacy garnered him many powerful enemies who considered him insubordinate and a source of embarrassment to the government; among those was President Calvin Coolidge. When demotion and banishment to an obscure post in San Antonio failed to quiet him, in 1925 he was brought up on charges of “bringing discredit on the military service.” He was found guilty, suspended from duty and pay. He resigned the following year, and until his death in 1936, promoted his ideas which proved to be all too accurate and, in his warnings of the growing Japanese threat in the Pacific, fatally accurate.

**At the University of Richmond,
this is Dan Roberts.**

Resources

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[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billy Mitchell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billy_Mitchell)

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