

Billy Mitchell - Father Of The Air Force

Born in the late 1800s and court martialled in 1925, Billy Mitchell's name is known as the founding father of today's Air Force. As the son of a Wisconsin senator, William 'Billy' Mitchell grew up in a wealthy family that had plenty of pull in their town. After gaining a degree from Columbia University, Mitchell enlisted after turning eighteen and was taken into the Army thanks to his father's influence. In the early 1900s, Mitchell's first astounding prediction stating battles would be more effective in the air than on land was made. As his military career progressed, Mitchell would become the youngest man to gain an assignment as a member of the General Staff where his interest in air flight increased. Deemed too old for flight training, Mitchell opted to take private lessons. This helped him gain ranking as a Brigadier General in charge of the American Air Combat Units during World War I. What seemed to be the start of a glorious career would soon spiral into a tailspin. Why was he court martialled? At the time, Billy Mitchell's ideas that planes could be used strategically in war for more than small bombing raids. He was certain that military planes would be extremely effective in mass bombings of targets both at land and over open waters. Though some military leaders were open to his suggestions, the government was not. Rather than back down from his ideas, Mitchell went to the public and made his thoughts heard. When the Navy craft Shenandoah crashed, he made an announcement that high ranking military officials should be blamed. His open scorn of the military led to his court martial that led to his resignation. This didn't stop his firm belief that one day Japan would attack the United States. In 1936, a few years before the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Billy Mitchell passed away from heart disease and a severe bout with the flu. When Pearl Harbor was bombed, military leaders had to scramble quickly. Had they listened to Mitchell's predictions, the tragic events may have been stopped. Billy Mitchell's memory lives on in classic films such as 'A Guy Named Joe' and 'The Court-Martial of Billy Mitchell.' Other events that have occurred since Billy Mitchell's death include: Former President Roosevelt and President G.W. Bush have both commissioned Billy Mitchell as an Army Major General following Mitchell's death. The Air Force Combat Action Medal is fashioned after a painting on Billy Mitchell's World War I plane. Mitchell's image was put on airmail stamps in 1999. Milwaukee's international airport is named after Mitchell 'General Mitchell International Airport. Colorado Springs high school, the William Mitchell High School was named after him. A man who was shunned towards the end of his career is now praised for changing the way air battles are fought and is honored throughout the world. William 'Billy' Mitchell is one of the best-known military leaders around.

About the Author

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