



Thud Ridge: F-105 Thunderchief missions over Vietnam

Jack Broughton, Hanson W. Baldwin (Introduction)

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This is the story of a special breed of warrior, the fighter-bomber pilot; the story of valiant men who flew the F-105 Thunderchief 'Thud' Fighter-Bomber over the hostile skies of North Vietnam.

Thud Ridge: F-105 Thunderchief missions over Vietnam Details

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Author : Jack Broughton , Hanson W. Baldwin (Introduction)

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From Reader Review Thud Ridge: F-105 Thunderchief missions over Vietnam for online ebook

Barry Urry says

A great book describing the day to day life of a fighter pilot. It is also a no nonsense look at politicians' ignorant attempt to run a war, by imposing rules and regulations that effectively "tie" the soldier's hands behind his back, and force him to fight at an unfair disadvantage. After reading this book I lost all respect for people like Bill Moyers. He was very outspoken about the way that the Bush Administration ran a war, but, as Johnson's press secretary, what was he doing with Johnson, McNamara at their Tuesday tea's, planning routes and missions for our men 14000 miles away? There were only one or two occasions where military planners were invited to these luncheons. Johnson once boasted that "a soldier couldn't even take a shit, without his say so." I never had respect for LBJ, but this book angered me, because he really didn't care about the F-105 pilots flying his, known routes into RP6 to bomb Hanoi. He didn't care that the NVA knew exactly the direction and altitudes of the pilots coming in on their bombing runs. Col. Broughton does an excellent job of describing a tactical run on Hanoi. He took many of the transcripts from a tape recorder that he had placed in his aircraft. He tells the story of the shoot-down of CMOH recipient Leo Thorsness and his WSO. An excellent book. Excellent treatise on the foolishness of politicians involving themselves in combat planning.

Dustin says

If you had to pick one guy to represent all Thunderchief pilots in both appearance and attitude, it's Jack Broughton. His honest, down to earth, no BS description of what it was like to fly the most dangerous missions in the most heavily defended area on earth at the time are spot on and priceless. You really get a feel for what it was like to be in the cockpit of one of these beasts, getting shot at by AAA, SAM's, and small arms, while flying in and out of foul weather in mountainous terrain. And then you realize that, if they survived (many didn't), then you turned around and did it all again the next day. These guys literally flew into the teeth of hell on a daily basis for a cause that we all know was lost because of the gross mismanagement of the Vietnam "conflict", and Jack Broughton did a great job of letting you know all about it.

Marc Baldwin says

This book isn't exactly a "page-turner" (which is why I'm giving it three stars), but it's a first-hand account by a guy who was flying combat missions into North Vietnam on a regular basis. He flew with a tape recorder in the cockpit, so I'm assuming that his retelling of some of his most difficult missions is extremely accurate with lots of detail. I'm amazed by the bravery and perseverance of the fighter/bomber pilots during that war.

What I appreciated about the book is that he wrote it in 1969 when the war was still going on. It doesn't have any of the 20/20 post-war hindsight that fills most war books, but has the honest words of a man in the midst of the battle. He laments restrictive rules of engagement, stifling bureaucracy, and a lack of consideration of the input of those on the front line, and having been in the military for 23 years, those are similar to the complaints from those on the front lines now. He considered that, to the detriment of the effort, the war was

being controlled by people sitting comfortably in their offices in Washington D.C. rather than being directed by the people who were facing combat on a daily basis.

The book isn't ghost-written by some journalism major. Colonel Jack Broughton flew combat missions in Korea and Vietnam, was awarded four Distinguished Flying Crosses, two Silver Stars, and an Air Force Cross. He knows what he's talking about.

Jas says

Heartbreaking frustration. These two words sum up the tour of Colonel Broughton who, like many of his peers, spent as much time fighting the system as he did the enemy. Deeply personal account of flying north of the border and his anger, frustration and sheer disbelief is raw throughout. His recording of radio traffic during missions has enabled him to portray an accurate account of the mayhem when SAMs, guns MIGs and sometime even colleagues fowl up best laid plans. The chapter detailing a four-day mission to recover separate downed crews is exemplary in describing how communication and distance impact on urgent decision making. This is a different style of book to When Thunder Rolls but equally valuable in telling the story of Thud on ops. Colonel Broughton clearly would've won no friends in the higher echelons of the USAF when this was written but his frank account from the coal face has many lessons that are just as applicable for military operations today.

George says

The very tactical story of a fighter pilot during the Vietnam war. This story goes very well with the story of Robin Olds. The author, Jack Broughton, was a seasoned fighter pilot and was serving as the vice commander of the Air Force wing at Takhli, Thailand. Flying and fighting, it also contains several vignettes about other people who helped in the effort, the base civil engineer and the chaplain for example. Broughton also discusses the poignant stories of attacks on Hanoi and lost buddies--I'd like to find out how they fared. Besides the yank and bank of the fighter pilot's world, we also got a glimpse of the amount of [idiotic] control placed on the people who fought...a ultimately a symptom of LBJ's dirt poor childhood. Lives were lost because of it. Those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it.

Tim Parnell says

First of all it's important to say I really really wanted to love this book. I'd been looking forward to reading it. Rather than the no-nonsense approach most reviews seem to claim, I so far find Jack Broughton's dialogue quite arrogant and dismissive of any one other than his immediate colleagues. Maybe the read will improve, I certainly hope so.

Todd says

A war memoir focusing on the author's participation in Vietnam in a unit of F-105s, Broughton put it together from personal recollection and audio recordings of radio chatter during air missions, giving the air

missions an often exciting retelling. The book is somewhat haphazardly organized, rambling more or less chronologically through Broughton's experience, with flashbacks and background thrown in as needed. He remembers to explain things at a fairly basic level most of the time, so one need not be a flier to understand it. Broughton brings a typical bias and bravado to his subject, regarding most non-fliers as inferior to pilots (with exceptions noted by name) and pilots of aircraft other than F-105s inferior to F-105 drivers, especially in terms of the sacrifices made and challenges overcome.

Broughton correctly notes the obnoxious level of restrictions and micromanagement combat fliers were subjected to, and, more importantly, the very human impact that had on them and the negative impact this had on the success of U.S. war aims. However, he makes no distinction between tactical restrictions (such as firing on SAM installations only after they fired on the aircraft) and much more strategic restrictions that were necessary for the envisioned success of war efforts (such as a buffer zone near the Chinese border to avert escalating the war substantially). Nor did he note the fact that gradual escalation was originally an Air Force officer's idea, laying the blame solely with civilian authorities. However, Broughton spares no criticism for higher headquarters in general, pointing out their own intrusiveness, slow response, mechanical handling of personnel, and abuse of combat pay rules. And, of course, headquarters did contribute to the lack of tactical flexibility and needless losses:

Over time there came ever increasing standard rules and tactics directed from a headquarters thousands of miles away...I am constantly amazed at the number of instant experts who have lost the ability to listen...the astronomical and unacceptable fighter losses, which skyrocketed in the latter part of 1967 to double their previous numbers, were largely due to ineptness, dictatorial enforcement of minuscule and incorrect details of tactical mission accomplishment, and lack of good sense and understanding of the actual air-war situation in the North on the part of command leadership at a high military level. (p 38-39)

And again, pointing out the one-way system of communication in the hierarchical military:

[O]ur inability to talk of practicality or to accept the word of those who physically do the job is hurting us all the way from the drawing board to the battlefield. Is our level of incompetence so high that the doer can never be heard? Is it inconceivable that a captain could know something from practical experience that a general doesn't know? (p 169)

Being basically a cockpit-version of history, Broughton makes no attempt to take on the larger question as to whether the Vietnam War could have been "won" under any circumstance, though his criticism of the way it was run tends to imply that maybe it could have been. His account may be too narrow for those with a general interest in the Vietnam war, but for those looking for a close-up of air combat in the Johnson era of the war, it does make for a quick, sometimes page-turning read.

Nick Gibson says

The highlight is absolutely the chapter titled "The Longest Mission", in which documentary radio chatter (captured on a cockpit tape deck) combines powerfully with human drama. The book is worth a read just for this detailed record of an attempt to rescue downed pilots in enemy territory. Broughton communicates the relentless difficulty of flying, communicating, refueling, fending off Soviet aircraft and SAMs and VC ground troops - all this for hour after hour while the ponderous monster of protocol and procedure crawls

along - in a plainspoken way that infuriates and exhausts without getting hyperbolic.

Scott Martin says

A first person account of air operations in Vietnam, the book provided a more personal/lower-level perspective of what was a tough and confusing war for the men who fought it. Many things stated in here were not new to me and it is fascinating how somethings have remained the same in spite of a difference of almost 50 years. For anyone who wants to read some more first-person type accounts of Vietnam, this is a place you can start. Not a great fan of the writing style per se, but worth a read at least once in your life.

Casey says

A good book, one of the first written about Operation Rolling Thunder, the air war over North Vietnam. Indeed this book, written by a fairly senior Air Force Pilot, was published while the Vietnam War was still ongoing, and it has to be read in that context. The emotion in the book is that of current events, rather than the emotion of the historic past. Though the book lacks a structure, it has a few solid themes: the frustration with how the air campaign is being conducted, frustration with various material issues suffered by the force, and frustration with the way people are being managed. Taking the reader with him on several missions, the author relives the critical decisions he and others made. During this journey the reader learns how the air war is conducted and where improvements are critically needed. One is definitely left with a better understanding of the frustration by pilots in the air war they fought. Great for those wanting first hand accounts of Rolling Thunder.

Johnny says

Normally, I wouldn't be open to reading anything from the Vietnam Era. The Vietnam Conflict was a shameful period in U.S. history and not a policy that I supported. Yet, in spite of my misgivings about policy, I realized some years ago when I met Navy pilot and bestselling author Stephen Coonts that there were many courageous men who fought over there because they believed they were making the world a safer place. *Thud Ridge* is the autobiography of another pilot from another service. Jack Broughton led a horrific number of bombing raids over that eponymous landmark and his candid testimony only adds further to my ambiguous feelings about the conflict—even though it made me admire the courage and efficacy of the fighting men in that conflict all the more.

As Caesar began his account of the Gallic Wars by telling us that Gaul was divided in three parts, Broughton tells us that Vietnam was divided into six sectors, numbered 1-6, with each ascending number representing escalating difficulty (p. 35). Yet, although he mixes in the occasional humorous episode, the bulk of the book underscores some of the bad policies that were implemented during the conflict.

On the humorous side, he tells of a flight leader who was accused by younger pilots of having inferior eyesight. So, one day, the old pilot called ahead and got the ID numbers of the tanker to which he would be assigned later that day. At an impossible distance, he claimed that he could read the ID numbers and, as the flight neared the tanker, they found that the old man was correct. The younger pilots knew they had "been had," but they were delighted with the prank and had to tone down their joking about eyesight (p. 68). On

another occasion, Broughton wrote up two evaluations on one of his pilots. He filed one, but called the pilot in to sign an ER which claimed that he couldn't get a decision out of said pilot because he was always in the air, that said pilot's maintenance crew were such a bunch of scavengers that they would "steal a rose off their mother's grave," and that he should be reassigned to the Pentagon so that he wouldn't do any harm (pp. 141-2). Still, the humorous accounts don't quite balance the number of deaths—many of which might have been avoided with better doctrine or procedures.

Here are some of the things that horrified me about military doctrine during that war.

1. Don't fire on MiGs until wheels off ground (p. 89)
2. Don't fire on SAM sites under construction (p. 93)
3. Fly same missions day after day until target destroyed (p. 98)
4. Don't abort mission until specifically over the target (p. 54)

There were lots of other things I learned as I read this book. I didn't know that pilots engaging in flak suppression often had to hang inverted for a period of time while the ground guns let everything loose on them (p. 128). I didn't know about the nickname GiBs ("guys in backseats"—p. 62). I was surprised to read that they never saw an parachutes after MiGs were shot down (p. 109) and didn't realize that many pilots had lost their lives via premature use of flares giving away their positions to the enemy (p. 195).

Most importantly, I didn't know the four things to do when one was hit:

1. Move the stick and kick the rudders to make sure you still had controls;
2. Check the gauges to make sure you still have hydraulic pressure;
3. Jazz the throttle a few times to be certain you still have engine power; and
4. Ascertain whether you are on fire (p. 220).

Thud Ridge allowed me to get over most of my bias against the Vietnam Conflict and appreciate the lives of those who had to fight in that conflict. It was a very important book for me and I urge those in a similar spot with me to take a different (and more personal) look at the difficult position in which military professionals found themselves.

George says

Thud Ridge is a first-hand account of F-105 fighter/bomber pilot and commander, Col Jack Broughton. He carried a small tape recorder on his missions and wrote this account shortly thereafter, giving it a strong dose of immediacy and credibility.

The air missions are unbelievably harrowing, partly because of the defenses they had to penetrate, but also because of the Rules of Engagement imposed upon them from 12,000 miles away in Washington D.C. This is a cautionary tale. The hard learned lessons of political meddling in tactical matters served this country well for the ensuing thirty years. Unfortunately, those who learned the lesson have since passed out of positions of authority. We now see the exact same mistakes being made with the predictable results.

Col Broughton's point is that politically restrictive Rules of Engagement result not only in tactical failures, but also in the needless loss of life for the brave men and women at the tip of the spear. Sending warriors into combat with one hand tied behind their backs is immoral.

Back to the missions themselves. Along with the 8th AF bomber missions in WWII, these have to be among

the most dangerous ever undertaken on a sustained basis.

Some criticize Col. Broughton as arrogant, but I suggest they don't understand the fighter pilot mentality necessary to survive in such a hostile environment. If he comes off as arrogant...he has earned it.

Paul says

Actual rating: 3.5 stars.

I remember reading "Thud Ridge" in 1974 as I was going through USAF pilot training, trying to get a feel for what flying fighters in combat was like, since I so badly wanted to become a fighter pilot myself. At the time, the very tail end of the air war in Vietnam, single-seat fighter pilots were the manliest men in the business, and that's the kind of pilot we all wanted to be. A few of us made it.

Today I volunteer at an air museum. I saw a copy of Thud Ridge on the docent library shelf and took it home to re-read. Forty-plus years hasn't changed my appreciation of the book much. I was a little less patient with Jack Broughton's complaints about the restrictive rules of engagement that exposed American aircrews to needless danger, but only because he was repetitious. The complaints are entirely valid; Broughton and other warriors who spoke out against the restrictions were right, and I am not at all convinced, after a 24-year career flying single-seat fighters myself, that things have changed all that much since Vietnam.

I read the book then for its descriptions of aerial combat; these remain the most gripping parts of Broughton's tale. Again, little has changed, and with experience I can now fully appreciate just how dead-on Broughton was. And macho? Good lord. Yankee air pirates and steely-eyed killers. If you ain't a fighter pilot you ain't shit. That's what you read this book for and that's what you get. I will never not admire anyone who flew the F-105 in combat.

At one point Broughton mentions singing "Mary Anne Burns Queen of All the Acrobats" with other pilots in a squadron bar and I haven't been able to get that great old song out of my head since. Excuse me while I, re-energized, go back to work on my memoir!

Kate says

A rather scathing indictment of the way a war is run, by an officer in the thick of fighting it. Not Iraq, but Vietnam. Lt. Col. Jack Broughton copyrighted his text in 1969, but it apparently wasn't published until 1985. Things that make you go hmm. Actually, reading this will make you go "shit, what the f**k were they thinking?" when you see how government 'planning' affects those trying to carry out the plan. That being said, this is a book born as much out of the anger and frustration at losing men in war as of any desire to offer insight into how Vietnam was fought. The author has an axe to grind, and while he's right on many counts, his vehemence to assign blame to "desk jockeys" up the chain of command ends up detracting from his tributes to his men and their bravery. But all is forgiven, for Broughton is not a author by trade, but a bomber/fighter pilot, and this book was written as he flew - by the seat of his pants.

Nick says

Thud Ridge was an exercise in frustration. Not from the book itself by any means - Colonel Broughton's writing was clear and concise. The book itself is a grand adventure; a description of the horror, humor, heartache and exertion that American pilots put into the air war over Vietnam. The frustration comes from hindsight - in 2013, looking back on how Washington handled the Vietnam War, you get the same sense of helpless frustration that the troops in 1967 did. Limited at every turn while North Vietnam took advantage of these limitations, the warfighters on the ground and in the air did everything they could to let Washington know that their plans weren't working, but to no avail.

There's a reason this book is one of the most well-known tomes on the air war over Vietnam and if you have even a passing interest in air combat or the Vietnam war, I recommend giving this a read. You will be frustrated to the point of wanting to throw the book at the wall in disgust, but I think that's the point; Colonel Broughton didn't pull any punches in his criticism of high command during Vietnam.
