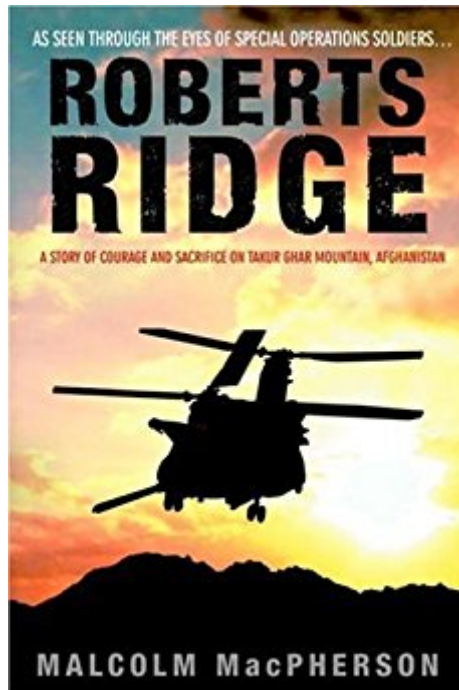




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Roberts Ridge



Synopsis

Afghanistan, March 2002. In the early morning darkness on a frigid mountaintop, a U.S. soldier is stranded, alone, surrounded by fanatical al Qaeda fighters. For the man's fellow Navy SEALs, and for waiting teams of Army Rangers, there was only one rule now: leave no one behind. In this gripping you-are-there account—based on stunning eyewitness testimony and painstaking research—journalist Malcolm MacPherson thrusts us into a drama of rescue, tragedy, and valor in a place that would be known as...ROBERTS RIDGE. For an elite team of SEALs, the mission seemed straightforward enough: take control of a towering 10,240-foot mountain peak called Takur Ghar. Launched as part of Operation Anaconda—a hammer-and-anvil plan to smash Taliban al Qaeda in eastern Afghanistan—the taking of Takur Ghar would offer U.S. forces a key strategic observation post. But the enemy was waiting, hidden in a series of camouflaged trenches and bunkers—and when the Special Forces chopper flared on the peak to land, it was shredded by a hail of machine-gun, small arms, and RPG rounds. A red-haired SEAL named Neil Roberts was thrown from the aircraft. And by the time the shattered helicopter crash-landed on the valley floor seven miles away, Roberts's fellow SEALs were determined to return to the mountain peak and bring him out—no matter what the cost. Drawing on the words of the men who were there—SEALs, Rangers, medics, combat air controllers, and pilots—this harrowing true account, the first book of its kind to chronicle the battle for Takur Ghar, captures in dramatic detail a seventeen-hour pitched battle fought at the highest elevation Americans have ever waged war. At once an hour-by-hour, bullet-by-bullet chronicle of a landmark battle and a sobering look at the capabilities and limitations of America's high-tech army, Roberts Ridge is the unforgettable story of a few dozen warriors who faced a single fate: to live or die for their comrades in the face of near-impossible odds. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

*20-year vet, grunt, SNCO. Where this book succeeds is in showing the character of Nate Self, in controlling the fatal outcome of the series of errors that led to the Battle for Takur Ghar. This book is detailed and works hard to include all the detail from the after-battle report. Sometimes, it gets a little confused at times with the kinetics of the firefight. The author does not glorify the action and appears to try to maintain an honest portrayal of the factors that contributed to the Operators, Rangers, FAC/PJs and Aircrew involved in the contact. It reads well. For a nonservice person, I would recommend pausing and googling some of the gear and acronyms to better enjoy the book. Spoiler*****A lot of people will be familiar with this event, given it was the biggest loss of US forces in Afghanistan to that date. All the guys involved deserve respect and our thanks for being there, feet in the mud doing their job. What this book will do for the serving and retired reading this is show the SNAFU that has accompanied soldiers since Gaius Julius Caesar, George Washington, Patton and Westmoreland. The author leads the reader through the critical failures that led to this engagement. From mechanical failures delaying the DEVGRU team to force the insertion at the hot LZ; to the inability of command chain to provide CASEVAC. Overall, it is a worth reading, when any of the past documentaries on the topic paint the engagement as something planned versus an accidental, series of events putting US forces in an uphill attack, against suppressive fire, without the correct equipment and support.

I really wanted to like this book as those who fought there did so with great courage and skill and made such incredible sacrifices. However, I felt the author let them down in two primary areas-a lack of background for the original insertion decision and the decisions made from afar during the fight. I was also disappointed with the very limited indexing. There are also some critical inconsistencies in the book. The Seals came to the area looking for a mission on very short notice. It

was apparently not their decision, but from far up the food chain and thousands of miles away in a flat land. There was a failure to appreciate the need to adapt to the altitude. Control of Takur Ghar was not seen as essential in the plan for the operation prior to the arrival of the Seals. However, the author appears to start with the premise that control was essential, but in the end accepts the view that it was not essential. The decision imposed on the Seals to make a direct aerial assault on the position after experiencing delays, rather than delay 24 hours, was an imposition from above. One of the grave risks of the new information age is that those (both military officers and politicians) receiving satellite, UAV data and perhaps battlefield video will abandon their roles of strategic planning and information dissemination in favor of making tactical decisions without situational awareness. It's a recipe for disaster. There's a reason that a great football coach is down on the field while the spotters and perhaps those who recommend plays are high above the stadium. In some respects the limitations of the book are a reflection of that lack of shared information and situational awareness which plagued the fighters during the events. According to Blaber (*The Men, The Mission and Me*) he was in contact with the Seal team during their fight and also in contact with the AC-130. This account treats Blaber as being out of contact which appears most unlikely given his role in the overall operation. He was uniquely qualified to provide the Rangers with much needed situational awareness. Overall it is a worthwhile read but I recommend reading three other books *Not A Good Day To Die*, *The Mission*, *The Men and Me*, and *First In* to get a better perspective on the war in Afghanistan in 2001-02

"Roberts Ridge" is the story of the battle for Takur Ghar, a mountain peak that dominates Afghanistan's Shahikot valley. The American military chose to invade that valley (Operation Anaconda) to trap and root out Taliban and Al Qaeda forces that, unknown to them, were deeply entrenched in the surrounding mountains. Relying on technological means, American commanders determined this strategic high ground was - against all military wisdom - unoccupied by the enemy. One helicopter after another tried to deliver assault, and then rescue, teams on what was actually a heavily defended enemy bunker complex. The book is primarily about what happened on that mountaintop over the course of about 17 hours. I put this book down thinking I had just finished two books, one subpar and the other outstanding. The early sections of "Roberts Ridge," are very weak and in fact caused me to stop reading it for a while. One problem is evident right away: the author drops you right into the action of the first helicopter going onto the mountain, with barely any context at all. He provides a very brief introductory section on the grand plans of Operation Anaconda, but no lead up of events to this insertion. In fact, about 1/3rd of the book goes by before the author

backtracks and provides the context that would've helped make more sense of the action. I understand wanting to grab the reader's attention with action right off, but the author waits far too long to explain the twisted circumstances that led to Takur Ghar. For that issue alone, I would highly recommend that a potential buyer first read "Not a Good Day to Die," which gives all the context on the battle that you'll ever need. That brings me to my second criticism. Once he does delve into the background of the events, the entire section feels either hurriedly written or badly edited. He skips around and glosses over what a reader of "Not a Good Day..." knows are critical points. Some of the transitions between section are head-scratchingly abrupt. What was there felt, to me, like the author summarizing - badly - what he just read in "Not a Good Day..." Since I read that book just before this one, some of the dialogue and descriptions in the contextual sections sounded overly familiar. Presumably, "Not a Good Day..." had not been released while MacPherson was doing his research (indeed, it's not cited as a source here), so I'm not in any way accusing him of plagiarism, but rather it seems the two relied on many of the same sources, leading to what seems like a lot of repetition. Just as MacPherson described one of the Rangers developing sharply-focused tunnel vision once the bullets start flying, the author does the same. The accounting of the battle on the ground as it unfolded covers the bulk of this book and is by far the best part. The author did numerous interviews with many of the participants and these first-hand accounts really pay off by bringing the reader down into the firefight. You get into the heads of some of the Rangers and other troops on the scene - what they were doing and feeling and why. Even though I knew what happened, it made for exciting reading. It is the skill with which the combat is told that saves this book for me. One of the things I liked about this that I didn't like about "Not a Good Day to Die" was that he finishes the book out by exploring what happened after the battle. He tells you, in brief, about the outcomes of some of the main characters, and, more importantly, what the meaning of the battle was and what impact it had. He concludes that Takur Ghar was irrelevant to the success of Anaconda, but that the battle for it drew an inordinate amount of resources and attention away from the main effort. In other words, the assault was done for no military gain and was in fact a failure for the Americans, despite overall success in the battle. His conclusions were drawn largely from an after-action report and study done by the military, from which MacPherson quotes at length and is even included in part at the end of the book. Because of its problems, I hesitate to recommend this book, but if you gloss over the weak parts and watch the guys in combat like a circling Predator drone, you'll enjoy it a lot more.

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