



Wings over the Mexican Border: Pioneer Military Aviation in the Big Bend

Kenneth Baxter Ragsdale

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Against a backdrop of revolution, border banditry, freewheeling aerial dramatics, and World War II comes this compelling look at the rise of U.S. combat aviation at an unlikely proving ground—a remote airfield in the rugged reaches of the southwestern Texas borderlands. Here, at Elmo Johnson's Big Bend ranch, hundreds of young Army Air Corps pilots demonstrated the U.S. military's reconnaissance and emergency response capabilities and, in so doing, dramatized the changing role of the airplane as an instrument of war and peace.

Kenneth Ragsdale's gripping account not only sets the United States squarely in the forefront of aerial development but also provides a reflective look at U.S.-Mexican relations of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, particularly the tense days and aftermath of the Escobar Rebellion of 1929. He paints a vivid picture of the development of the U.S. aerial strike force; the character, ideals, and expectations of the men who would one day become combat leaders; and the high esteem in which U.S. citizens held the courageous pilots.

Particularly noteworthy is Ragsdale's portrait of Elmo Johnson, the Big Bend rancher, trader, and rural sage who emerges as the dominant figure at one of the most unusual facilities in the annals of the Air Corps. *Wings over the Mexican Border* tells a stirring story of the American frontier juxtaposed with the new age of aerial technology.

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