

Air Power and the Air Force

Mitchell clearly saw the need to organize the nation's air power to promote its development and effective use. Mitchell wrote: **"The first thing that the United States should do is to establish a Department of Aeronautics specially charged with the development of all matters relating to the air."**¹¹⁵

Mitchell was a zealous proponent of air power as a separate and distinct military component, a United States Air Force. Through the employment of integrated air power, under the command of airmen skilled and knowledgeable in air power, Mitchell believed air power could most effectively realize its capabilities.

- To what, then, is the true development of a modern system of national defense to lead in the future? It is to establish the air force as the first line of defense of the country. Actually it is now, whether recognized as such or not.¹¹⁶
- While we need every branch of national defense to form the complete chain. We must not lose sight of the fact that our aviation at present is the weakest link in our chain, that we are the one country which can maintain and support an aviation more easily than any other, and that it is more important for our national defense that we maintain a large air force than is the case with any other nation.¹¹⁷
- Worse than anything else, the naval air forces are tied up to the navy on the water and the army air forces are tied up to the army on the land—neither is made to think that its main mission is in the air and that it must keep itself free from encumbrances on land or sea.¹¹⁸
- Our air force, however, by attacking their transportation trains, railroads and columns on the roads, piled them up with debris so that it was impossible for many of

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their troops to get away quickly, resulting in their capture by our infantry.¹¹⁹

- And, if it is not done in time of peace, it will be all over when war is declared because the air force will be the first to attack.¹²⁰
- [The] branches of aviation are just as distinct as artillery is from infantry is from cavalry.¹²¹
- The three branches of Aviation constitute the offensive power of an air force. They all work together, and are interdependent.¹²²
- All branches of aviation depend on each other to a greater or less extent in order that they may be able to carry out their functions in the air.¹²³
- When operations are projected, all the air forces must be instructed in what these are to be. This information is contained in what is known as the aeronautical plan of employment. It is drawn up by the commander of the air forces, submitted to the commanding general of the whole forces, and is published in the form of orders by the headquarters. It is the most important document dealing with the air operations, and its thorough understanding by all the air forces is essential to an efficient performance of their duties.¹²⁴
- I read them the orders myself and asked each one individually what he could do to comply with them.¹²⁵
- I always kept an officer at my headquarters, whose name I shall not mention, whom I had read all the orders. If he could understand them, anybody could. He was not particularly bright but he was one of the most valuable officers I had.¹²⁶
- All military development, no matter what its nature, has depended on three things, improvement of armament, that is, better rifles, guns and cannon, greater mobility, that is speed of movement, communications, roads, railways; and last numbers of effective units at the decisive point. An air force has two of these three elements developed to a very high degree, that is

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mobility and power of concentration. The armament is being improved constantly.¹²⁷

- A united Air Force would provide an aeronautical striking force designed to obtain control of the air and demolish whatever hostile land or water targets might be necessary, according to the military situation.¹²⁸
- Heretofore, to reach the heart of a country to gain victory in war, the land armies always had to be defeated in the field and a long process of successive military advances made against it. . . . Now an attack from an air force using explosive bombs and gas may cause the complete evacuation and cessation of industry in these places. This would deprive armies, air forces, and navies even, of their means of maintenance.¹²⁹
- A modern organization of a country's military power, therefore, indicates that aircraft will be used over both land and sea for combating hostile air forces, demolishing ships on the sea and important targets on the land.¹³⁰
- Eventually, all military power of the Government should be concentrated under a single department which would have control over all national defense, no matter whether it be on land, on the sea, or in the air.¹³¹
- The first element to enter into combat with the enemy will be the air force.¹³²
- Suitable and adequate preparation of the air arm, and of the personnel required to man the aircraft, manufacture the equipment, and supply such a force, cannot be furnished by the Army or Navy, or by the two combined, as has been the experience in all countries in the recent War. . . . Neither the Army nor the Navy, nor both combined can be expected to develop, organize and perfect a flying corps, and its employment, to the greatest possible limit of which that weapon is capable.¹³³
- The air force had become as specialized in its own work in the air as the armies were on land and the navies on the water. Pursuit, Attack, and Bombardment aviation

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were just as different as Cavalry, Infantry, and Artillery.¹³⁴

- The size of the air force that may be employed is unlimited, because it has the whole air in which to operate, as distinguished from roads or railroads on the ground, or even an ocean, with its limitations of a single dimension, distance and coastlines. Compared to armies, an air force is not tied down by roads. It can move to any place entirely unhindered . . . speed, power of vision, and maneuverability. . . .

From its speed alone an air force has the power of taking the offensive against either a navy or an army, and engaging these forces under its own conditions. Providing an air force has gained control of the air, it can completely conceal its own movement, or the movement of an army on the ground or a navy on the water, by preventing hostile reconnaissance. . . .

Consequently, the only defense against an air force is another air force, and as an indispensable prelude to any engagement, whether it be on the water or on the land, there must be an air battle to determine which side shall control this area above the earth and the water.¹³⁵

- There is no defense against an air force except an air force.¹³⁶
- Have the necessary air forces always ready at the outbreak of war, because this is the first of our arms that will enter into combat and it is upon a favorable air decision that the whole fate of a war may depend.¹³⁷
- Once an air force has been destroyed it is almost impossible to build it up after hostilities commence.¹³⁸
- One kind of airplane or air organization can no more perform all the duties required of an air force than can Artillery, Cavalry or Infantry acting alone form a whole army.¹³⁹
- If you do not allow us to equip our aviation with American material, you are merely putting our first line of our national defense—that is, the air force—in the

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hands of foreign nations that some day may be our enemies.¹⁴⁰

- The whole thing should be known as the Air Force, and the personnel should be assigned either to an active or reserve status.

The active air force should carry out its peacetime military instruction in combination with the Army and Navy, and also in maneuvers to bring out its own special work.

The reserve air force should be organized definitely into squadrons, groups, brigades and higher units, right alongside of the active air force units permanently in the service.

Our first division then of the Department of Aeronautics will be an Air Force, with the unusual staffs required for such an organization—that is, an Administration Section, . . . Training and Operations Section, . . . Equipment Section, . . . Medical Section, . . . [and a] Legal Section.

Besides the Air Force there should be two main divisions under the Department of Aeronautics—the Supply Division and the Division of Civil Aeronautics.¹⁴¹

- There are a great many points of difference between the management of an air force and that of an army or navy. An air force operates in a new medium, the air, which offers a wider scope for action than either land or water.¹⁴²
- The same conservatism in the development of new methods of war is what has wrecked many nations before and what has made every war we have had dangerous to our well-being, and very expensive.¹⁴³
- If you scatter the air force all around, it leads to double overhead, to a double system of command, and to many other difficulties. It has been proved wrong everywhere.¹⁴⁴
- Every pilot, every ship, and every airdrome are distinct assets as a part of the national defense.¹⁴⁵

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- I want it to be distinctly understood that I do not consider that the air force is to be considered as in any sense supplanting the Army. You have always got to come to manpower as the ultimate thing, but we do believe that the air force will control all the communications, and that it will have a very great effect on the land troops, and a decisive one against a navy.¹⁴⁶
- To begin with, when any operation is contemplated by the superior command, the reason for the operation, the objectives to be attained, and the general system which will be followed are prescribed. The Air Service then prepares its plan of employment, which is a statement containing an estimate of the situation with respect to the enemy's position, his ground troops, and any special features bearing particularly on the aeronautical situation.¹⁴⁷
- Weather is a most important consideration for the flying man whether he be in an airplane, airship, or an ordinary balloon.¹⁴⁸
- Airplanes have to start from and come back to a flying field, therefore the organization and handling of fields is a very important matter.¹⁴⁹
- The best way to ensure safety in the air is to estimate what may go wrong and make adequate provision against it.¹⁵⁰