

Air Power and Control of the Air

From his combat experiences in World War I, Mitchell realized the need to control the air. He saw that control of the air was not simply a task to be achieved at some point, but a prerequisite to all other military action. **“No navies can operate on the seas, nor armies on the land, until the air forces have first attained a decision against the opposing air forces, so as to allow those on the water to operate against their enemy. Therefore, as a prelude to any engagement of military or naval forces, a contest must take place for control of the air. The first battles of any future war will be air battles. The nation winning them is practically certain to win the whole war, because the victorious air service will be able to operate and increase without hindrance.”**¹⁵¹

- Our aviation doctrine should be find out where the hostile air force is, and to destroy it as rapidly as possible.¹⁵²
- Once supremacy of the air has been established, airplanes can fly over a hostile country at will. ¹⁵³
- Their anti-aircraft defense from the ground was excellent and well co-ordinated with their air force, but this, of course, is merely an auxiliary of the air force itself. It acts as their sentinel and is a means of signaling to the airplanes by the projectiles shot out by the guns, in addition to its positive value of fire attack against aircraft. It has not decisive effect on air battle. ¹⁵⁴
- The proper application of air power adds tremendously, not only to the offensive ability of a force, but if the air is held, a very weak ground force can retreat with ease before a very much superior enemy. ¹⁵⁵
- Pursuit aviation . . . is the kind designed to take and hold the offensive in the air against all hostile aircraft, . .

WILLIAM "BILLY" MITCHELL'S AIR POWER

. it is with this branch of Aviation that air supremacy is sought and obtained.¹⁵⁶

- Pursuit squadrons are essentially an offensive element, and to enact their role successfully, they must take and maintain the offensive. They should seek the enemy and wherever found, attack and destroy him.¹⁵⁷
- The first problem over the water, therefore, as it is over the land, is to assure command of the air by Pursuit Aviation.¹⁵⁸
- A large lumbering airplane or collection of airplanes, no matter how well armed, cannot resist the surrounding attack of Pursuit Aviation.¹⁵⁹
- The tactics of Pursuit Aviation may be likened very much to those of Cavalry in the mounted attack in the old days. The elements to be utilized to the greatest extent are surprise, boldness of action and an attack in echelon, that is, successive formations designed to envelop and surround the enemy with a fire attack. This branch of aviation calls for more dash, more quickness of thought, and instant appreciation of tactical situations in the air, than any other military arms.¹⁶⁰
- All other branches of military aeronautics are helpless without an adequate, strong, well-trained and well-equipped Pursuit Aviation. . . . No one understands the necessity for this kind of aviation as the airmen themselves do.¹⁶¹
- If the troops think that enemy planes can get through the lines and shoot their own balloons down—they are usually from three to five miles behind the line—they become imbued with the idea that the enemy is controlling the air entirely, and that everything they do is seen and reported.¹⁶²
- Future control of the seas depends on the control of the air. This is so to an even greater extent than is the case on land, because on the sea, the shipping—using the surface of the water—cannot conceal itself to the same extent that man or his equipment can be concealed on land.¹⁶³

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- Should a nation, therefore attain complete control of the air, it could more easily master the earth than has ever been the case in the past. ¹⁶⁴
- For fighting against aircraft all means of defense against aircraft should be attached to the Air Force. ¹⁶⁵
- The principal mission of Aeronautics is to destroy the aeronautical force of the enemy, and, after this, to attack his formations, both tactical and strategical, on the ground or on the water. The secondary employment of Aeronautics pertains to their use as an auxiliary to troops on the ground for enhancing their effect against hostile troops. ¹⁶⁶
- The primary mission, therefore, of our air service is to seek out, attack, and destroy the air service of its enemy. It is essentially an offensive arm in its tactical application, and all air services should be organized with that end in view from a strategical standpoint. With a proper organization an air service can be brought to bear against an enemy with much more rapidity than any other arm. ¹⁶⁷
- The moment that airplane attacked airplane, the principal mission of the air force was to whip the hostile air force, so as to enable the airplanes to observe, to drop bombs, or attack troops. . . . Today, the principal mission of an air force is to destroy the hostile air service, just as the mission of an army is to destroy the hostile army. ¹⁶⁸
- We should first get control of the air, and then work directly in combination with whatever is on land or on the water to further the main object of the campaign. ¹⁶⁹
- The pursuit ship is the most essential always because you cannot control the air without the pursuit ships. ¹⁷⁰
- These bombardment raids have to be protected by Pursuit Aviation, and the plan of employment prescribes the general method by which this will be done. ¹⁷¹