

Airmen in Air Power

Mitchell saw air power as uniquely distinct from any form of military combat that had yet been devised. He felt that air power was more distinct from land and sea power than the two were from each other. Because of this, airmen were uniquely distinct from soldiers and sailors.

“The air-going people actually form a separate class. They are more different from landmen than are landmen from seamen.”¹⁷² In this same way, Mitchell believed that only airmen should be charged with commanding airmen and air forces.

- Already, we have an entirely new class of people that we may call “the air-going people” as distinguished from the “land-going people” and the “sea-going people.” The air-going people have a spirit, language, and customs of their own.¹⁷³
- There is a basic difference in the nature of combat indulged in by an air force as distinguished from an army or navy. In the army, the infantry soldier is the basis of the organization. Everything else is built up on him. . . . With the air force, the soldier or enlisted man is a highly trained mechanic, having a knowledge of shop methods and machine tools, armament, weapons, optical instruments and photography and all sorts of engines and materials. . . . The pilots and observers who constitute the officer personnel are the ones who do the fighting, much as the knights did in the Middle Ages, attended by their men-at-arms, squires, grooms and lackeys. The result of this condition is a very close personal association between the flying officers and enlisted men under them.¹⁷⁴
- Not only does an air force know what each branch of aviation is doing in the air when acting with an army or with a navy, but it has to keep in constant touch with everything that is taking place on the ground or the

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water. The airman, therefore, not only from his position of advantage in the sky looks down on the whole field of battle and surveys the contests between hostile air forces in the clouds, but he knows the particular mission which every distinct part of the force, whether on the ground or in the air, has had assigned to it. He knows a great deal about the general operations and mission of the whole force, so that he can act independently on it in case of necessity. Many times the good judgment of a lieutenant pilot has changed the whole aspect of an air and ground battle.¹⁷⁵

- An air officer was selected because his training gives him an insight into the land and sea operations, which no other service can possess.¹⁷⁶
- The man who does the fighting in the air force is a very high order of human being. Whereas the attack is made by units larger than the individual plane, in the last analysis of a combat, it is the individual plane that closes with his adversary and fights him, either by the fire action of his guns or bombs and gas screens, or possibly, now that we have parachutes, by ramming. There is no one very close to support and talk to him or give him assistance, as there is with ground troops in the army. He is absolutely on his own.¹⁷⁷
- Few people outside the air fraternity itself know or understand the dangers that these men face, the lives that they lead and how they actually act when in the air, how they find their way across the continent with unerring exactness—over mountains, forests, rivers and deserts; what they actually do in improving the science and art of flying and how they feel when engaged in combat with enemy aircraft. No one can explain these except the airmen themselves. The number of those who have experience and who are capable of expressing themselves, is rapidly growing fewer. Every opportunity should be taken by those that remain to enlighten their fellows on this subject.¹⁷⁸

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- The airmen have gained their knowledge by actual experience, not by being members of an old well-established service that has gone on in the same rut of existence for decades. . . . With us air people, the future of our nation is indissolubly bound up in the development of air power.¹⁷⁹
- The greatest of all our assets, however, were the wonderful pilots and air officers which this country had created.¹⁸⁰
- The pilots of these planes, from vantage points on high, see more of the country, know more about it, and appreciate more what the country means to them than any other class of persons.¹⁸¹
- Bold spirits that before wanted to “go down to the sea in ships,” now want to go “up in the air in planes.”¹⁸²
- The work of the air force depends on the men that fly the planes, not primarily on those that remain on the ground.¹⁸³
- The individual airman, therefore, bears more responsibility and requires a higher tactical and strategical training than any other individual in the military service.¹⁸⁴
- No one can know the air except one who works and travels in it, and a thorough air education can only be acquired by long study and experience in this science and art. The greatest handicap under which aeronautics has labored in all countries and particularly in the United States, has been the fact that the Government agencies charged with the development of aviation have, in practically every case, been organized with a non-flying direction at their head, which could not possibly know or appreciate the problems concerned in its development.¹⁸⁵
- Technical ability is an exact science, and can be learned very largely in schools and colleges. The duties of an air force lie in the air, and it is there that all the personnel concerned with its handling must receive the maximum amount of training.¹⁸⁶

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- So many new elements came into the training of fliers that a whole new system of education has been developed for them.¹⁸⁷
- In addition to the tactical requirements, all supply officers, technical officers, medical officers, or anybody concerned with the Air Service should have sufficient flying education to enable them to appreciate the problem in hand.¹⁸⁸
- Ninety per cent of the effectiveness of an Air Service depends on the morale and initiative of its personnel.¹⁸⁹
- There is no place in any service in which individual responsibility has to be exercised to the extent that it does by the airman.¹⁹⁰
- It was amply proved in the European War that officers trained in army methods on the ground could handle Infantry, Cavalry, Artillery, or other troops, or all of them in combination, but it was proved more strongly that they could not in any way handle air troops until given a thorough aeronautical education. To put flying troops in the hands of officers not trained in their use is to throw them away.¹⁹¹
- The actual pilots who are engaged in the handling of the airplanes, therefore, must be the final judges of whether the equipment is any good for the object that is to be attacked or not.¹⁹²
- There is a greater community of feeling among people who go in the air than is the case in any other calling.¹⁹³
- The military flyer must move at tremendous speed through the air. Not only must he fly his own airplane, but must see all the other airplanes around him, friendly as well as hostile ones; he must observe the ground, be ready to attack or defend himself at any instant, be ready to land on any sort of surface, mountains, forests, plowed ground. He may have to fly for hundreds or thousands of miles to his destination and there deliver his cargo or bombs, or report what he sees, or make his attack either against hostile air forces,

vessels on the sea or vital centers. It is a supreme test of character and courage.¹⁹⁴

- The men are the all important things. It is very necessary to keep up your supply of skilled pilots in connection with aeronautical operations.¹⁹⁵
- Not every officer was capable of becoming an airplane pilot, very few in fact. Beside such physical and mental characteristics as alertness, splendid eyesight, initiative, endurance, they must have a natural aptitude for the air.¹⁹⁶
- Safety of the pilot and the airplane which he flies is very largely due to the excellence and mechanical ability of the enlisted men. To get good men in time of peace requires competition with existing trades in civil life. In the Air Service, we have to have some seventy-five trades. There is no surer way to ruin an Air Service than by making it impossible for it to maintain and keep efficient enlisted men.¹⁹⁷
- The officers who entered the Air Service and are making a career of it are those who have the initiative to go into the most dangerous branch of the Service, whose losses in time of peace are commensurate with those in other branches in time of war, who are building up this Service in spite of the difficulties to be overcome, and who, for that reason, have the maximum amount of initiative and are not given the rank in proportion to the commands which they now have.¹⁹⁸
- The Air Service, more than anything else, depends for its efficiency on a well instructed personnel, bold in the carrying out of its air duties, and with initiative sufficient to develop this newest of arms.¹⁹⁹
- With an army on the ground, a person is shoulder to shoulder with another. If he is wounded, he can lie down on the ground and be aided by his comrades. If he is on the sea, he is in a ship close to his companions. When in the air, however, he is away from these, off by himself thousands of feet up. If he is not successful, he goes down in flames.²⁰⁰

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- The old discipline, as conceived and carried out by armies and navies throughout the centuries, consists in the unhesitating obedience by a subordinate to the orders of his superior. . . . With the aviator, however, the keenest, best educated, most advanced type of man has to be selected. These are some of the reasons why an officer raised in an army or navy atmosphere is totally incapable of understanding an airplane pilot's mentality or the way to handle or develop him.²⁰¹
- My mind was made up more than ever to rely on the judgement of the doctors as to a man's fitness for flight. Our doctors proved their value more and more every day.²⁰²
- The more I saw of the way non-flying officers were conducting our Air Service, the surer I was of many rocks ahead.²⁰³
- The thing we most greatly lacked was superior commanders for our larger air units. There were practically no officers of the regular army who were competent. None of them had had any experience in war and with very few exceptions, none of them were good enough pilots.²⁰⁴