

Air Power Functions

As a pioneer of military aviation, Mitchell saw firsthand the growth of aviation and the beginnings of its tremendous potential. Used first as an observation platform for land forces, then as a means of aiming artillery, aviation quickly achieved success as a combat force unto itself through air superiority, attack, and bombardment.

The many functions of air power, however, were given but a brief preview before World War I ended. Mitchell writes: **“The European War was only the kindergarten of aviation. It had machines that were just invented, the possibilities of their use were just beginning to be understood by the aviators themselves, while others looked on them as strange creations that were defying all known laws of science, of custom and of war. . . . Without a doubt [aviation] would have had the utmost influence in settling the war had [the war] lasted another year.”**²⁴⁹

- The mission of Observation Aviation is to find out and report to the commanding officer of the troops to which it is attached what is in front of him, and in his vicinity.²⁵⁰
- [Observation aviation] is the best known and the one which is concerned more with the troops on the ground than any other.²⁵¹
- The next duty of Observation Aviation deals with the adjustment of fire of artillery or other missile-throwing weapons.²⁵²
- Another distinct branch of Observation Aviation is what is called Surveillance. These are the airplanes that remain over hostile positions—or off a coast-line for instance—and report back by wireless what they see.²⁵³
- They formed elevated and fixed platforms from which observation could be continued both by day and night if necessary, and, as they were in constant communication

WILLIAM "BILLY" MITCHELL'S AIR POWER

with the ground through their telephone centrals, they could be connected with the organizations of troops, both of the Artillery, Infantry and Headquarters.²⁵⁴

- In fact, the principle of all observation is that, whenever a place can be seen by a terrestrial or ground observer, a balloon is not used; what can be seen from a balloon is not handled by an airplane, and the things that the ground observers and the balloons cannot see are assigned to the airplanes.²⁵⁵
- On account of the speed of airplanes and the fact that they must occasionally land on the surface of the ground to replenish their fuel, ammunition and personnel, it is necessary first that very efficient means of communication be provided so that these air forces can be properly guided for the work that they are required to do.²⁵⁶
- Day Bombardment, in addition to demolishing objects, had the effect of forcing the enemy to defend with his air forces the areas attacked, and no better indication could be found of its efficiency than the great resistance which the enemy would offer to the Day Bombardment Aviation.²⁵⁷
- The basis of air force power is the bombardment airplane or bomber.²⁵⁸
- Its specific mission is to attack troops, trains of automobiles, convoys, railroad trains, tanks, debarkations from trains, ships or vessels, warships, or any military object on the ground or the water which exposes itself to attack from the air by cannon, machine guns, or light-weight bombs. Attack Aviation works at low altitudes.²⁵⁹
- The idea of having an armored plane to attack troops on the ground was a pretty good one.²⁶⁰
- Attack Aviation is designed for the direct attack, with cannon, machine guns, and grenades, of hostile troops on the ground, tanks, anti-aircraft formations of all sorts, hostile airdromes, motor trains, railroad trains, or anything of that nature.²⁶¹
- The attack airplanes have to work in the closest harmony with their own Pursuit Aviation.²⁶²