

VICTORY THROUGH AIR POWER

BY

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VICTORY
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THE CHALLENGE TO AMERICA

1

THE MOST significant single fact about the war now in progress is the emergence of aviation as the paramount and decisive factor in warmaking. There is still some difference of opinion as to the precise role of aviation in the immediate future, its relation to the older military services, its role in this or that specific battle or campaign. But there are no two opinions on the fundamental fact that aviation has altered the traditional textbook conceptions of strategy and tactics. All experts agree that air power will play an ever more decisive part in determining the power balance among the nations of the earth. But it does not need an expert to recognize this towering truth. It is inescapable in the day-to-day news from every theater of conflict.

Since world empires have depended throughout history on the available weapons of domination, the advent of this new weapon—swifter and more destructive than any in the past, equally potent on land or at sea—must affect fundamentally the pattern of life on our planet. It has already, indeed, gone far toward smashing the accustomed power designs and toward sketching the future picture.

This process, it is self-evident, involves the United States as intimately as it does any other great nation. A realistic understanding of the new weapon, of its implications in terms of national security, of its challenge to America, is not a matter of choice. It is the very condition of national survival.

At the outbreak of the Second World War and for at least two years thereafter, the United States lagged dismally in military aviation—not only absolutely, considering the technical potentialities of aeronautics, but even relatively, compared with the achievements of other nations, especially Germany and Great Britain. Despite bureaucratic attempts to blur its outlines, the record is clear. American military aviation, when the European war started, was primitive and haphazard, whether measured by the yardstick of military performance—range, armament, fire power, speed—or by the yardstick of planned strategy, tactics, and organization.

As dramatically as though it had been staged by providence as a warning to the American people, our own entry into the war, on December 7, 1941, was signalized by a humiliating defeat through enemy air power. The tragedy at Pearl Harbor, on that day, underlined soon thereafter by the sinking of the British battleships *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* from the air, cut through national complacency and brass-hat smugness. The terrific danger was exposed for all to see. That initial week shocked the American people even as the French people had been shocked when German aviation and Panzer divisions ignored their Maginot Line.

The challenge of air power cannot be met by merely “admitting” our failures and undertaking to “catch up” with more advanced countries. The tempo of air-power expansion is much too swift. A nation content to imitate and “catch up” must in the nature of the case remain backward, trailing foreign leaders. The method of trial-and-error is ruled out because the penalty for error may be loss of national independence. We cannot afford to wait and see, to suspend judgment; we may not have a second chance. The challenge can be met only by exploring the physical and psychological causes of our tardiness and weakness in the air, applying

radical surgery rather than surface cures, and preparing for nothing less than undisputed first place in the epochal race for aerial supremacy.

The rapid obsolescence of aeronautical equipment, especially now under the impetus of a great war, enables us to overtake and outstrip other nations, provided we take advantage of it without delay. It offers us the chance *to skip intermediary stages of development* and reach out boldly beyond the present confines of aviation types. As far as the aircraft of tomorrow is concerned, all nations are starting from scratch. America is more richly endowed with the resources of brains, materials, personnel, and industrial efficiency than any other country on earth. Whether it utilizes these potentialities, or once more allows itself to trail along imitatively, depends on how quickly and thoroughly we comprehend the nature of the new weapon—and on how quickly and thoroughly we cleanse our air power from the accretions of conservatism, timidity, and astigmatic leadership.

In this book I hope to contribute toward that emancipation of American air power. I want to focus attention on the new principles of warfare shaped by the emergence of military aviation and demonstrated by the experience of the present war. Above all, I hope to convey the sense of air power as a dynamic, expanding force, the growth of which must be anticipated by courageous minds. It happens to be a force that eludes static, orthodox minds no matter how brilliant they may be. Air power speaks a strategic language so new that translation into the hackneyed idiom of the past is impossible. It calls not only for new machines and techniques of warmaking but for new men unencumbered by routine thinking.

We must not merely outbuild any potential enemy or combination of enemies—that is the lesser half of the job for a

machine-age nation like the United States. We must *outthink* and *outplan* them, in a spirit of creative audacity. As long as aeronautics remains merely another industry, or just another adjunct of national defense, America will be foredoomed to a secondary position among the air-power nations. Aviation must be apprehended by the whole American people as the essential expression of the present-day world and given unbounded room for development. All those gifts of mechanical ingenuity, industrial efficiency, and, above all, imaginative daring which have made America the first nation of the industrial era must be given full play in American air power.

Let me at the outset summarize my basic convictions, in the simplest terms:

1. The rapid expansion of the range and striking power of military aviation makes it certain that the United States will be as exposed to destruction from the air, within a predictable period, as are the British Isles today.

2. Those who deny the practical possibility of a direct aerial attack on America are lulling the American people into an utterly false sense of safety which may prove as disastrous to us as the "Maginot Line mentality" proved to France.

3. To meet this threat to the existence and independence of our country we must begin immediately to prepare for the specific kind of war conditioned by the advent of air power. That can mean only an interhemispheric war direct across oceans, with air power fighting not over this or that locality, but by longitude and latitude anywhere in the uninterrupted "air ocean." Such preparedness calls not merely for more aviation but for new military organization and new strategic conceptions.

4. Despite immediate shortcomings, there is no excuse for a defeatist approach to the problem. On the contrary, America has all the prerequisites for victory in the race for domi-

nation of the skies. It has all that is required to make it the dominant air-power nation, even as England in its prime was the dominant sea-power nation of the world.

The pressing immediate need is for a national awakening to the threat implicit in air power—and to the urgency of preparing not merely to meet it but to take the offensive initiative. Autonomous and specialized organization for air power, freed from the restraints and inertias of long-established army and naval organizations, is almost axiomatic. It will follow, I believe, just as soon as the American people break through their present lethargy.

If we continue to ignore these looming aeronautical facts, if we remain stubbornly committed to pure Army and Navy strategy, we shall be helpless when the interhemispheric *aerial conflict* catches up with us. I do not relinquish the hope that we shall be amply prepared long before that happens. But for the sake of emphasis—as a warning rather than a prophecy—I visualize a contingency as melodramatic as this:

2

FROM EVERY point of the compass—across the two oceans and across the two Poles—giant bombers, each protected by its convoy of deadly fighter planes, converge upon the United States of America. There are thousands of these dreadnaughts of the skies. Each of them carries at least fifty tons of streamlined explosives and a hailstorm of light incendiary bombs. Wave after wave they come—openly, in broad daylight, magnificently armored and armed, surrounded by protective aircraft and equipped to fight their way through to their appointed targets. Aerial armadas now battle boldly and fiercely, just as great naval armadas used to do in the past, only with a destructive fury infinitely more terrifying.

With the precision of perfect planning, the invading aerial giants strike at the nerve centers and jugular veins of a great nation. Unerringly they pick their objectives: industrial centers and sources of power, government seats and fuel concentrations, especially the American aviation setup of airdromes and factories.

The havoc they wreak is beyond description. New York, Detroit, Chicago, and San Francisco are reduced to rubble heaps in the first twenty-four hours. Washington is wiped out before the government has a chance to rescue its most treasured records. A dozen crucial power plants like Muscle Shoals, Niagara Falls, and Boulder Dam are wrecked, crippling a great section of American industrial life at a single blow. A thousand tons of explosives deposited expertly on a few great railroad depots like those at Chicago dislocate the country's transportation system.

Scarcely five years have passed since the bombardment of Warsaw, Rotterdam, London, Hamburg, Coventry, and other European cities. Yet they seem a mere rehearsal for this massive and cataclysmic attack on America. Every one of the new bombers carries more destructive force than a hundred of the once-dreaded Stuka dive-bombers or two dozen of the largest horizontal bomber planes used in those milder years. A single assault now inflicts as much death and damage as two or three months of the famous Nazi air attacks on the British Isles back in 1941. One expedition now lays waste a hundred cities like Coventry.

In this first concentrated aerial assault on the nation, the enemy attacks not only vital strategic objectives, but objectives of a sentimental character. The purpose is to stir up every ounce of patriotism and induce a mood of sacrifice and desperation which coaxes the entire air force of the nation to rise for combat despite the odds. Our "purely defensive"

aviation accepts the challenge and gallantly takes to the air. But it proves sadly inadequate. Its military characteristics, the tactical ideas on which it has been nurtured, are wholly unsuited to the task. The entire force is quickly smashed and reduced to impotence.

Then begins the tedious, unceasing process of total destruction of a great nation from the air. It resolves into the kind of "three-dimensional aerial blockade" which was dismissed as "visionary" when described in the past by aviation men. The merciless blockade not only cuts all external lines of communication, as in the orthodox blockade of the pre-aviation era; it destroys internal lines of communication and primary centers of national life. If the blockade of the past was a wall or fence around the enemy, the new type may be compared to an inverted bowl or dome, under which the enemy is gradually suffocated.

Not until this all-out offensive by a combination of enemies on both sides of the world got under way did the American people realize their country's vulnerability. They had been put to sleep by the lullabies of optimists. Did they not enjoy the blessings of vast "ocean ramparts" and of thousands of rolling miles between the Atlantic and the Pacific? Were they not "isolated" by nature itself? The first genuine all-out trans-oceanic air attack shatters such illusions of size and distance. The new air weapon is contemptuous of miles. With the circumference of the earth annihilated by sustained flight, the old concepts of space have simply evaporated.

Now the American people discover too late that the most highly industrialized nation is the most exposed to the ravages of the new air menace. Backward and primitive peoples can take to the woods and the caves and there survive a rain of air bombs. But Americans, proud heirs of the most advanced machine-age civilization, depend on their industry

and their power resources and their urban population centers—all of which are of necessity highly centralized and crowded into comparatively small congested areas, offering ideal targets for the raiders of the skies. A few well-placed bombs blot out public utilities, cut off water supplies, bury a million city dwellers under the debris of their skyscrapers, disrupt industrial life, and interrupt the flow of food and supplies.

As the cyclones of aerial devastation sweep through the land, hour after hour, day after day, only one thing proves more shocking and demoralizing than the physical destruction and the fantastic loss of life. It is the sudden and incredible realization that the immense program of defense to which the country gave its best efforts and billions of dollars in the preceding five or six years is largely irrelevant to this total war from the skies. True, there are millions of trained and well-equipped soldiers on tap; an army superbly mechanized and brilliantly commanded. But they all become mere frustrated onlookers. True, our two-ocean navy is almost completed; by general acclaim it adds up to the finest and strongest naval force the world has ever seen. Yet it can now do nothing, literally nothing, against the locust swarms of giant airplanes. The multibillion navy is itself as pathetically exposed to the onslaught as any other surface target.

As the air attack proceeds, as the country begins to writhe under the suffocating blockade, a panic-stricken nation wonders when the invasion by millions of enemy troops will begin. Our own mechanized land forces are hastily deployed to meet them head on. Every inch of our coastlines and land frontiers has been elaborately fortified for miles and miles inland. After the first horrifying week of the aerial devastation the country begins to *wish* for the land invasion that it had feared—anything seems preferable to the relentless pounding from on high.

Then the stricken people begin to understand that there will be no "invasion" in the old-fashioned sense of the word. The enemies have no intention of undertaking a slow and costly mile-by-mile conquest of America on the ground. They prefer to hammer the nation into a writhing mass of ruins from overhead. They prefer to bleed America to the point of utter exhaustion and helplessness, demolishing its cities and its industries, wrecking its complicated machinery of existence and its national morale, smashing all inside and outside communication lines to tighten the stranglehold of an aerial blockade.

In the past, too, there had been talk of "total war." But now it is being demonstrated for the first time. America is not being attacked piecemeal but *as a totality*. There is just one target: the whole country. A few farsighted aviation strategists had foreseen this type of third-dimensional warfare. Only now, with the disaster upon them, do people begin to grasp the fact that the epoch of troop landings and war "fronts" and struggles for a few miles of disputed soil has ended forever. The key word is no longer *occupation* but *destruction*.

And the destruction is now systematic, scientific—the planned wrecking of a great nation. It becomes clear even through the panic and the rising tides of death that the enemy's purpose is not merely to force us to surrender. It is to break our strength, destroy our civilization, lay low our cities, decimate our population, and leave us to dig out of the debris slowly and painfully.

After the nation has been paralyzed by bombing and incendiarism and wholesale slaughter, and starved through the disruption of all transport, the futility of resistance becomes apparent. The government offers to give up the hopeless struggle. But the attackers ignore the offer. The aim of total

war is total destruction: to obliterate the United States as a modern nation. The enemy continues the macabre job of superwrecking to achieve that purpose, to eliminate this nation as a world factor, economically and politically, for generations to come.

3

THE PICTURE, I am fully aware, will seem fanciful at first blush. Those who dare to visualize it so vividly and to paint it as an emerging reality lay themselves open to the charge of being alarmists and panicmongers. Even thus General de Gaulle and other Frenchmen were branded as alarmists when they warned that frontier fortifications and huge armies were not enough in this age of aviation. Yet there is nothing remotely fanciful about the nightmarish picture. Technically it has been within the limits of reality for some time. Only psychological meekness and deficient military imagination have prevented the transfer of the technical potentials into functioning facts.

Under the terrific pressures of our war for self-preservation, however, timidity is being changed into courage. The full possibilities of aviation will inevitably be utilized. No such disaster as I have sketched out will overtake America—not because it is impossible, but because we shall be prepared to prevent it. American air power equal to the fearful challenge will be on hand. It will not only frustrate the enemy's attack on America; it will carry the "total aerial war" to the attacker's home grounds.

Present-day aviation—through military shortsightedness rather than aeronautical limitations—lacks only one element to make the awe-inspiring picture of America under aerial onslaught wholly realistic. That element is aviation "reach"

or range that will expose the continent of North America to direct blows from other continents. The fact that such range has not been incorporated in equipment thus far exhibited in the world struggle does not imply any technical limitation in the science of aeronautics. It is due simply to the failure of all nations to grasp the full implications of the aerial weapon—to the inertia which keeps principles of warfare inviolate long after they have outlived their usefulness. Admiral Mahan, our great theorist of sea power, long ago noted the lapse of time between technical advances and their strategic exploitation for sea power.

His words apply no less to air power. It is only this time gap which has postponed for a while longer the kind of aerial operation that I have tried to describe. As soon as hostile air power can strike across oceans as readily as it now does across narrower waters, the United States will become every bit as vulnerable as England. Broad oceans will then be just so many English Channels, Skagerraks, and Sicilian Straits. Whether they are barriers to shield a nation or highways of destruction will then depend entirely on the size and effectiveness of our own air power.

The fact that the enemy must travel a few hours longer to reach its goal and to return to its home base after unloading cargoes of death will not diminish the destructive force in the slightest. It will matter nothing that the armadas of bombers will fly ten hours or more before reaching American objectives. They will be crossing at substratospheric altitudes, with relief crews, under ideal conditions of comfort. On arrival at their targets, the crews will be as fresh and rested as if they had stepped out of their homes after breakfast. In modern planes, after all, what is the difference between flying three hours to the interior of Germany or Italy and flying ten hours across the ocean to the interior of the

United States? *Of all the elements involved in the undertaking, the period of approach is the least hazardous and the least exhausting.* Normally it is the least dangerous if only because the initiative lies with the attacker.

Once the bomber is over enemy territory, whether it is the Ruhr or Pennsylvania, the English Midlands or Chicago, London or New York, makes not the slightest technical difference. The procedure after arrival is identical—and so are the disastrous consequences upon the victimized area. Continuous waves of air power from overseas will mean continuous bombardment despite the longer interval of approach—just as the flow of a river remains unbroken although its point of origin may be thousands of miles away.

We need only make the assumption of a vastly expanded aviation range—an assumption fully justified by the scientific aeronautical facts—and instantly the exposed position of America becomes evident. Imagine the reach of air power multiplied three to five times, and the tactical position of the United States becomes precisely the same as that of the British Isles today.

The range of military aviation is being extended so rapidly that the Atlantic will be canceled out as a genuine obstacle within two years, the Pacific within three years. After that, in five years at the outside, *the ultimate round-the-world range of 25,000 miles becomes inevitable.* At that point any nation will be able to hurl its aerial might against any spot on the face of the globe without intermediary bases. By the same token every country will be subject to assault from any direction anywhere in the world. The blows will be delivered from the home bases, regardless of distance, with all oceans and bases in between turned into a no-man's land. Indeed, in order to dominate the world from the air, a nation does not need to wait for the ultimate 25,000-mile range. The