

B' Ομάδα Θεμάτων

Writing Activity Four: The History of Aviation, Part VI

Focused Reading

Read the text below about the Air War during WWII and answer the following questions.

1. What do you think about the bombardment of Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Was it absolutely necessary or could have been avoided and how?
2. Do you think young people nowadays are worried about the possibility of a nuclear war?
3. How do you think the inventor of the atomic bomb felt after Hiroshima's bombing?
4. Comment on one of the following quotes made by historical figures of WWII.
 - a. *"If we lose the war in the air, we lose the war and lose it quickly."*
 - Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery (most well-known British general of WWII, famous for his victory at the Battle of El Alamein).
 - b. *"Air power may either end war or end civilization."*
 - Sir Winston Churchill (British Prime Minister who led the country to victory against Germany and the Axis powers).
 - c. *"Good airplanes are more important than superiority in numbers."*
 - Air Vice-Marshall J. E. "Johnnie" Johnson (Royal Air Force (RAF) pilot who, during the WWII, claimed 38 victories over enemy aircraft).

THE AIR WAR DURING WWII

Grasping the whole concept of such a massive war that depended so much on air superiority is a difficult task. Operations involving air units were often unorganized and done on a "whenever the CO (Commanding Officer) sees fit" kind of fashion. The success of missions often relied solely on the orders of the officers in charge and the strength of the aircraft. Introducing someone to the general ideas of what happened in the skies over Europe and the Pacific during WWII is no easy task.

To start off, you will need a good idea of the four major air forces at work during WWII. There was the USAAF (United States Army Air Forces), RAF

(Royal Air Force - British forces), Luftwaffe (German air force), and the Japanese Army Air Force or Navy (IJAAF or IJN). The countries participating in the air war were not limited to these forces, however. Hundreds of countries were participated.

During the Battle of Britain in 1940, Supermarine "Spitfires" of the RAF shot down hundreds of the Luftwaffe's Messerschmitt Bf-109's with the aid of radar, which was new to the British. Not only did the RAF fighters go up to meet the advancing Luftwaffe fighters and bombers, but they proved efficient on the offensive too. Nightly bombing raids on German cities and military installations was commonplace, and was designed to break the will of the people to fight. It also stalled the German war effort of production, and gave the Allies a slight edge. With waves of fighters meeting single German planes that entered British airspace, the Luftwaffe were pushed back to the defensive position.

On the other hand, the USAAF proved to the world America's power in the aircraft industry during WWII. The massive production of aircraft during WWII has carried the USA into the spot as a major manufacturer of aircraft, by companies such as the widely-recognized Boeing and Lockheed corporations. Great fighters such as the world-famous P-51 Mustang, the P-38 Lightning, P-40 Warhawk, F4U Corsair, and more were produced in the USA and used by Allied forces everywhere. Bombers such as the B-17 Flying Fortress, B-24 Liberator, B-29 Superfortress, and B-25 Mitchell claimed fame across the globe. These warbirds helped win the war, and did a superb job at it too.

The pride and power of the Nazi regime, the Luftwaffe was deadly to Allied air forces. Their bombers were not successful in most occasions (due to high loss rates) but the fighters scored innumerable kills on Allied bombers. American B-17's and British Lancasters were big sitting ducks in the sky. Some kills were scored with the bomber's machine gun defenses, but a quick burst from a Luftwaffe Messerschmitt Bf-109 or Focke-Wulf 190 could mortally wound the slow bombers. Most of the American and British bombers did not survive the swift attacks from the Luftwaffe fighters, especially if they had already met the outer-ring of German flak guns protecting Germany. Many thought the powerful Luftwaffe would lead Germany to a grand victory before American fighters entered the picture. Towards the end of the war, the Luftwaffe slowly disintegrated with the rest of the Nazi power, but a small come back was made with the war's first jet fighter, the Messerschmitt 262. If Hitler hadn't made his grand blunder with his insistence that the Messerschmitt 262 be a more powerful fighter-bomber, this aircraft could have turned the tide of the Allied victory. The few Me-262's that were used primarily as fighters had extremely high kill rates against bombers and fighters alike. Thankfully, the shortage of available Me-262's and their late entry into the war let the bombing campaign go unstopped. The Luftwaffe crumbled with the rest of the German army.

After the massive bombing on December 7th, 1941 of Pearl Harbor, the US was clearly aware of the Japanese air strength. The mighty Mitsubishi A6M2 "Zero" was deadly to US naval fighters and torpedo/attack aircraft. They were swift and carried quite a firepower punch. Although the Japanese aircraft were deadly, they were gradually surpassed by new American planes. As Japanese

death rates rose, a new idea was implemented. Commonly known as “Kamikazes,” these suicide pilots would dive bomb US ships with aircraft full of explosives. These pilots were extremely honored by the Japanese and operated under a special code of conduct called the “Bushido code.” The basic thing to know is that the Japanese air forces started off strong but gradually lost their effectiveness, even though tough fighting was still present on the ground.

Before the US was forced to invade Japan, atomic bombs were dropped on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by US B-29 Superfortress bombers. Millions of Japanese lives were lost, and the surrender came almost immediately after the attacks. The USAAF had planned several more atomic bomb drops had two not been adequate.

Express your opinion

Answer the following questions expressing your opinion.

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