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D-Day Air Dominance and Its Impact on Today

D-Day is a battle remembered for the brave men who stormed Normandy Beach, but most people don't know about the airborne side of the battle and how the battle was won in the air as much as on the ground. It was June 6, 1944 when Supreme Commander Dwight D. Eisenhower made the invasion official. With 160,000 American, British, and Canadian troops it was the largest naval, air, and land invasion at the time. Though the battle is most famous for the ground invasion, an allied victory would not have been possible without achieving air dominance.

The success of D-Day was unparalleled, but so was the cost. In the first 24 hours of the invasion over 10,000 Allied troops died, and in the ensuing weeks over 73,000 allied troops died in the battle for Normandy. It really is staggering to think about how every single one of those fallen soldiers was a man who was probably in his low twenties or even high teens, and could have had a wife or even kids that would never get to see him again, but such is the cost of war. The bravery of those men is unmatched by anyone else, and is something we can learn from today. The people who lived through World War II are often called the Greatest Generation. It is a justified name because of the great sacrifices they made to keep our country and many others free.

Air dominance was maintained throughout the entire invasion of France, but how did they manage to push back the German air power and destroy its ability to fight? In the months

leading up to D-Day, the Allies air force had been pounding the Luftwaffe during many bombing runs and dog fights. The most notable of these was February 20-25th Operation Argument or Big Week. During Big Week the Allies bombed many strategic places including German factories which produced the vast majority of German planes. In that week alone, the Allies dropped as many bombs as they did the entire year before. The success of the bombs dropped was not all that hindered the Luftwaffe. Although the Allies suffered the loss of many bombing crews, they also shot down many German fighters most of which were not replaced. This, along with the skill and bravery of the allied pilots, helped the Allies acquire and maintain air dominance.

Something that isn't as well known about D-Day is how much the Allies airborne troops contributed to the invasion and ultimately the victory. On the night before the invasion, over 24,000 troops landed from the sky, and were either paratroopers or rode in the Airspeed Horsa, which was a glider used to land troops Behind enemy lines. The troops from the Horsa Glider and paratroopers captured the Pegasus Bridge, and destroyed multiple bridges on the Dives River which slowed the progress of German reinforcements. They also secured many roads and crosspoints that the Nazis relied upon, which in turn helped the troops on the beach. The Horsa was very useful for landing troops from the sky, but it was also very flimsy. Made of just fabric and wood, it would often break apart upon landing especially during improvised or crash landings. Airborne troops were vital in the invasion, and without them the Allies may not have secured the victory that started the Nazi downfall.

Another very important piece in the equation of air dominance was the planes themselves. One of the primary planes used on D-Day was the P-51 Mustang. The P-51 was an American fighter plane mostly used as a long-range bomber escort due to its exceptional

range. However, it was only partially used as an escort on D-Day, it was also used to support the troops on the ground by dropping 500-pound bombs on German defenders, trains, and other targets. They did do some escorting though; they helped protect the B-17 “Flying Fortress” which was the main bomber of the invasion. The P-51 was a very effective tool for the Allies throughout the war and especially on D-Day where it used both of its talents.

The B-17 “Flying Fortress” was a key piece to the invasion as well, but it could not have done it alone. As I mentioned earlier, the P-51 Mustang was used as an escort for the B-17 on D-Day. In earlier bombing runs the B-17 had suffered heavy losses. Those losses were considerably diminished when they started receiving fighter escort. The trouble was they still didn’t get an escort every time, but they did on D-Day which greatly helped them. The role of the B-17 for the invasion was to destroy strategic sites such as bridges, railroads, and panzers. Their efforts were not in vain. They suffered few losses and knocked out many targets. Through the help of the P-51 Mustang and the B-17 “Flying Fortress”, the ground troops were able to establish a beach head in Normandy.

The Allies had obtained overwhelming air dominance over the Germans, and could not have made the invasion a success without it. The first reason is simple, the troops would not have been able to cross the English Channel if the Luftwaffe was overhead bombarding them. Also, if the Luftwaffe had been over the English Channel, they would have lost the element of surprise which would have given them no chance of any success. If the allies had not had supremacy in the air, they may not have been able to drop paratroopers, or bomb strategic sites, but with the crippled state the Luftwaffe was in, the Allies were able to accomplish this without very much opposition. The reasons that air dominance was effective

for the Allies are never ending, and that explains why the allies put so much emphasis on overhead support for the ground troops.

“He who would trade liberty for some temporary security deserves neither liberty nor security.” This is a famous quote from Benjamin Franklin, and it was put into action on D-Day. The men that fought in WWII, including D-Day, showed that they were ready to lay down their lives for freedom. Through all the dangers these men pushed forward, and many paid the ultimate price of freedom. Without the sacrifice of these men, the Nazis may never have been stopped and could be controlling us right now. I am very thankful for what those men did on the battlefield.

The victory at D-Day is still relevant to today’s generation. This battle must never be forgotten. Free nations today owe their democracy to D-Day. It is among some of the most epic victories in history, and for good reason. The time, effort, money, and lives spent on air dominance to secure this victory was of a staggering scale, and has had a lasting impact to the generations that followed. Without the air supremacy and the victory of D-Day the war would have most likely dragged on for many more years. Germany would have continued to overrun most of Europe and North Africa. They would have continued to set up murderous police states, killing anyone who was so called “undesirable” to the Nazi regime, which sought to engineer a master Germanic race. The evil would have continued, and many more lives would have been lost. It’s hard to imagine what the world would be like today if the Allies had not orchestrated air dominance and been victorious.

For me personally, learning about air dominance and D-Day inspires me to be ready to do my part to preserve our freedom just as past generations did 80 years ago. Also, I want to not take for granted my freedom, knowing it didn’t come free. It was hard fought for.



Learning about the tactics and sacrifices of these hard working and brave people helps me to appreciate the free country that I live in. I have also been inspired to tour some of the WWII museums, cemeteries, and monuments knowing that I will now appreciate more the valiant people these memorials represent.



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