

Big Week: Smashing the Luftwaffe, February 1944

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Summary:

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During the third week of February 1944, the combined Allied air forces based in Britain and Italy launched their first round-the-clock bomber offensive against Germany. Their goal: to smash the main factories and production centers of the Luftwaffe while also drawing German planes into an aerial battle of attrition to neutralize the Luftwaffe as a fighting force prior to the cross-channel invasion, planned for a few months later. Officially called Operation ARGUMENT, this aerial offensive quickly became known as "Big Week," and it was one of the turning-point engagements of World War II. In *Big Week*, acclaimed World War II historian James Holland chronicles the massive air battle through the experiences of those who lived and died during it. Prior to Big Week, the air forces on both sides were in crisis. Allied raids into Germany were being decimated, but German resources--fuel and pilots--were strained to the breaking point. Ultimately new Allied aircraft--especially the American long-range P-51 Mustang--and superior tactics won out during Big Week. Through interviews, oral histories, diaries, and official records, Holland follows the fortunes of pilots, crew, and civilians on both sides, taking readers from command headquarters to fighter cockpits to anti-aircraft positions and civilian chaos on the ground, vividly recreating the campaign as it was conceived and unfolded. In the end, the six days of intense air battles largely cleared the skies of enemy aircraft when the invasion took place on June 6, 1944--D-Day.

Big Week is both an original contribution to WWII literature and a brilliant piece of narrative history, recapturing a largely forgotten campaign that was one of the most critically important periods of the entire war.

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