

Revision

Economic and Military Strengths of the United States

The Allies won WW2 due to the economic and military strengths of the United States.

After the attack on Pearl Harbour, the United States' vast resources were mobilised within a short period of time. Its people, factories, shipyards, farms and even Hollywood and the movie industry joined in on the war effort. By 1944, the US was producing almost half of the weapons being made globally - more than twice of what Japan and Germany were producing combined. In total, between 1941 and 1945, the US produced 250,000 aircraft, 90,000 tanks, 350 naval destroyers, 200 submarines and 5,600 merchant ships.

This massive production derived from American economic strength translated into military strength that supplied it and the other Allied powers with military equipment and resources essential for the war effort that the Axis powers simply could not match. Hence, this gave them an overwhelming advantage that allowed them to win the war.

Efforts of the United States in the Battle of the Atlantic

The Allies won WW2 due to the efforts of the United States in the Battle of the Atlantic.

Control of the Atlantic was vital to the Allied war effort as it was the only way vital American supplies could be shipped to Britain and USSR. This control was only achieved through bitter struggle and at a great cost to the Allies. German submarines (U-boats) were very effective early in the Battle of the Atlantic. In 1940, the Germans sank over 1,000 British ships, a quarter of Britain's merchant fleet. In 1941, 1,300 Allied ships were lost. In 1942, 1,661 ships. As a result, in January 1943, the British navy had only two months of oil supply left.

The tide began to turn in 1943 when British intelligence managed to break the secret codes used by the U-boats, allowing Allied convoys to steer clear of the U-boats and deliver the supplies to Britain and the USSR that could be used to fend off the Axis powers. Weapons and tactics were developed to counter the U-boats.

This victory allowed the much needed American supplies to reach Britain and the USSR, allowing them to continue the fight against the Axis that would ultimately conclude in an Allied victory in WW2.

Island-Hopping Strategy in the Asia-Pacific

The Allies won WW2 due to the United States' island-hopping strategy in the Asia-Pacific.

To avoid a potentially lengthy and costly battle against the Japanese forces which had dug themselves into island strongholds across the vast empire they had built from 1937-1945, the Allies came up with the strategy of island-hopping. It involved using air attacks and submarines to isolate Japanese-held areas, instead of trying to capture them. The Allies would then conquer the islands, which were poorly defended, and use them to further cut off ships that supplied the well-defended islands. The idea was to cut off some areas from their supplies of food, ammunition and other essentials.

This approach proved to be successful. It allowed the Allies to incur fewer casualties and come within striking distance of Japan itself within just a few years. It thus contributed to Allied victory in WW2.

Poor Planning

Germany suffered from poor planning in regards to its navy. While the Germans' use of U-boats was effective, its use of surface ships was less so. They put too many resources into building giant battleships such as the Bismarck and Tirpitz, but failed to build aircraft carriers.

These weaknesses in its navy led Germany to defeat in naval battles such as the Battle of the Atlantic, which meant it was unable to cut off Britain and the Soviet Union from the vital supply of American resources shipped across the ocean. This failure ultimately contributed to its defeat in Ww2.

Germany also suffered from poor planning in regards to its air force. From 1942 to 1945, the RAF and US Air Force bombed Germany relentlessly. The Germans never developed heavy bombers such as the RAF's Lancaster or the US' B-17, which could do severe damage to towns and cities. German bombers were too small and could not carry enough bombs. Also, in the Battle of Britain, the RAF had the advantage of radar, which the Germans had not invested in. The RAF also had plenty of fuel, ammunition and spare parts. On the other hand, shortages in these resources plagued the Luftwaffe.

These weaknesses in its air force put it at a major disadvantage against the Allies that it could not overcome, ultimately contributing to its defeat in World War 2.

Inter-Service Rivalry

The Japanese army and navy had a long-term conflict with each other since the Meiji period. In the 1930s, both services of the Japanese military had different strategic goals and ideas for how they wanted to seize territories to obtain resources to sustain Japan's economy. When the war broke out, the rivalry between the army and the navy prevented both groups from sharing resources and exchanging military intelligence, much less coordinate their attacks and defences against the allies. For example, in 1942, when the navy asked the army to provide troop support for an invasion of Australia, the army refused. Furthermore, the army remained unresponsive throughout the Pacific War and was late to recognise the threat of the US counteroffensive in late 1942.

This rivalry prevented the Japanese from making the best use of its resources, putting it at a disadvantage and thus contributing to the Axis defeat.

Over-stretched Empire

One reason the Axis powers lost WW2 was due to Japan's overstretched empire.

The Japanese were unable to effectively leverage the empire they had expanded from 1931 to 1941. The Japanese empire was very spread out. In many areas, rail and road communications were poor, so it was difficult to deliver raw materials and workers efficiently to the places where they were needed.

This inability to effectively allocate its resources due to its size meant that the Japanese empire was at a disadvantage and thus contributed to its defeat by the Allies.

Poor Planning (Japan)

The Japanese failed to understand that the war at sea had changed by 1941. Air power, in the form of aircraft based carriers, was now far more important than traditional naval power like battleships. Therefore, while the Japanese damaged US battleships during the attack on Pearl Harbour, they did not destroy any US aircraft carriers, as they were not located at the base. This outcome allowed the US navy to recover from the attack quickly.

This failure to recognise that the nature of a naval warfare had changed and adapt to a focus on carrier based combat meant that the Japanese empire was at a disadvantage and thus contributed to its defeat by the Allies.

Lack of Local Support

The Japanese were unable to make the best use of their empire because of how brutally they had treated the peoples they conquered. They looted the resources of the conquered lands. They also abused the locals and forced thousands into slave labour. This resulted in millions of civilian deaths under Japanese rule. As a result, the conquered peoples began to resist in any way they could against the Japanese. For example, in Vietnam, the nationalist leader Ho Chi Minh led the Viet Minh in a guerilla campaign which eventually wore down the Japanese.

The lack of local support within its empire meant that the Japanese could not effectively extract the resources it needed from the territories it controlled. That said lack of support also often led to outright resistance also drained Japanese military forces as they would be required to be redeployed to suppress such forces. This thus caused the Japanese empire to be put at a disadvantage, contributing to its defeat by the Allies.