

Why did the Allies win WW2?

Strengths of the Allies

Importance of the United States - Economic and Military Strengths of the United States (Europe and the Asia-Pacific)

Example and Explanation

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

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This massive production derived from American economic strength translated into military strength as it supplied it and the other Allied powers with a vast amount of military equipment and other resources essential for the war effort. Resources that the Axis powers simply could not match, thus giving the Allies a overwhelming advantage that allowed them to win the war

Importance of the United States - Battle of the Atlantic (Europe)

Example and Explanation

Control of the Atlantic was vital to the Allied war effort as it was only control of the shipping routes across the Atlantic that vital American supplies could be shipped to Britain and to the USSR. This control was only achieved through a bitter struggle and at a high cost by the Allies. German submarines (U-boats) were very effective early in the Battle of the Atlantic. In 1940, the Germans sank over 1,000 ships, a quarter of Britain's merchant fleet. In 1941, 1,300 Allied ships were lost, and in 1942, 1,661 ships. As a result, in January 1943, the British navy had only two months' supply of oil left. The tide began to turn through 1943. British intelligence was able to break the secret codes used by the U-boats. This allowed the Allied convoys to steer clear of the U-boats, hence ensuring Britain and the USSR had the resources to fend off the Axis powers. New weapons and tactics were also developed to counter the U-boats.

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

Allied victory in World War 2.

Importance of the United States - Island-Hopping Strategy in the Asia-Pacific (The Asia-Pacific)

Example and Explanation

To avoid a potentially lengthy and costly campaign against the Japanese forces which had dug themselves into island strongholds across the vast empire they had built from 1937-1941, 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.

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This approach proved to be successful. It allowed the Allies to incur fewer casualties and come within striking distance of Japan itself in just a few years. It thus contributed to Allied victory in World War 2.

Importance of the United States - Use of the Atomic Bomb (The Asia-Pacific)

Example and Explanation

Faced with the strong resistance of the Japanese forces, the United States decided to use its newly developed atomic bombs without warning. On 6 August 1945, the American bomber, Enola Gay, dropped a five-ton atomic bomb, nicknamed "Little Boy", over the Japanese city of Hiroshima. Following this, on 9 August, the United States dropped a second atomic bomb, nicknamed "Fat Man", over the city of Nagasaki. In total, the two atomic bombings killed more than 100,000 people and injured another 100,000.

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The devastation brought about by the two atomic bombs was one of the key reasons for Japan's surrender, securing Allied victory in World War 2.

Importance of Britain - British resistance to German invasion (Europe)

Example and Explanation

A key factor in the defeat of the Axis powers was Britain's ability to resist the German invasion in 1940–1941. During the Battle of Britain, Britain's Royal Air Force (RAF) had excellent fighter aircraft such as the Supermarine Spitfire, and the Hawker Hurricane British aircraft were as good as the Germans'. Additionally, the factories were able to keep producing more of such aircraft to replace their losses. Moreover, the British had the new technology of radar which could be used to detect and locate incoming enemy aircraft.

Fighting over home ground also gave the British the advantage of tapping large reserves of spare parts for repair work and using less fuel for its war production.

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Thanks to these advantages, the British were able to win the Battle of Britain and prevent a German invasion of their country. This allowed Britain to become a substantial military base for the Allies. A base that made the D-Day landings of 1944 and the Allied bombing campaigns against Germany possible. Campaigns that ultimately led to the defeat of Germany.

Importance of Britain - British resistance to the Japanese (The Asia Pacific)

Example and Explanation

The British Empire was a major source of the manpower and resources that opposed the Japanese in the Asia-Pacific. The armies and navies of Britain, Australia, New Zealand and around 120,000 African troops from British colonies fought alongside US troops against the Japanese. The British Empire forces also included the immense manpower and resources of India. India provided over 2.5 million men and women and a staggering 80 percent of its wealth to the Allied war effort. Although Indian troops fought in North Africa and Europe as well, the majority fought in Asia against the Japanese.

Link

Thus the British represented a major component of the manpower and resources opposed to the Japanese in the Asia-Pacific. They thus played a vital part in the effort to defeat the Japanese and securing an Allied victory in World War 2.

Importance of the USSR - Reorganisation and resistance (Europe)

Example and Explanation (Reorganisation)

When the German advance was halted by the Russian winter in late 1941, Stalin and his military leaders used this time to reform the Red Army completely. They copied many of the tactics and ideas used by the Germans and added some of their own. For example, the Red Army created specialist tank armies and air forces. At the same time, harsh discipline was enforced, such as, Order 227 of July 1942 which ordered the Soviet Army to fight and die for every bit of Russian soil.

Link (Reorganisation)

By taking such steps to reorganize the Red Army, the USSR was able to improve its ability to fight the Germans. An ability that ultimately allowed them to turn the tide and not only push the invaders out of their country but to launch a counterattack that saw them invading and occupying parts of Germany itself, securing victory in World War 2.

Example and Explanation (Resistance)

The Soviet Union suffered heavy losses in the early phases of the German invasion. However, it nevertheless continued to fiercely resist. The Germans had advanced again in 1942 towards the city of Stalingrad. Here, the Soviets held them in a fierce battle and, despite suffering heavy casualties, were eventually able to encircle the Germans, forcing them to surrender.

Link (Resistance)

This victory raised the morale of the Soviets as they began to drive the Germans back. A counterattack that led to them not only pushing the invaders out of their country but invading and occupying parts of Germany itself, securing victory in World War 2..

Importance of the USSR - Resources and Production: The Soviet War Economy (Europe)

Example and Explanation (Measures taken by the USSR)

To ensure production kept up with the high demand needed by the Red Army in its fight against the Germans, the Soviets enacted harsh measures. For example, adults in the USSR received no food unless they worked in some way for the war effort. This applied to men and women – half of the Soviet workforce was female. Forced labour was also used and the secret police kept close control of the population.

Link (Measures taken by the USSR)

These measures allowed the Soviet Red Army to not only continue to oppose the invading Germans but also steadily grow in strength. Strength that ultimately allowed it to turn the tide and not only push the invaders out of the Soviet Union but to launch a counterattack that saw them invading and occupying parts of Germany itself, securing victory in World War 2.

Example and Explanation (Role of the USSR's allies)

The USSR's allies also made important contributions to the campaign. Britain and the United States supplied vast amounts of food, raw materials and industrial equipment via shipping routes despite the U-boat threat from Germany. The United States provided the USSR with over 500,000 motor vehicles and 1,900 locomotives and half of its supply of rubber tyres and copper.

Link (Role of the USSR's allies)

This aid allowed the Soviet Red Army to not only continue to oppose the invading Germans but also steadily grow in strength. Strength that ultimately allowed it to turn the tide and not only push the invaders out of the Soviet Union but to launch a counterattack that saw them invading and occupying parts of Germany itself, securing victory in WW2.

Importance of the USSR - Entry to the Asia-Pacific (The Asia Pacific)

Example and Explanation

As agreed at the Tehran Conference and Yalta Conference, the USSR entered the war against Japan three months after the defeat of Germany. Despite being part of the Allied forces, the USSR did not take part in the war against Japan in the Asia-Pacific until 1945. This was because Japan and the USSR had signed the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact in 1941 which was to be upheld for five years. On 8 August 1945, the Soviets declared war against Japan and launched their invasion simultaneously on three fronts of Manchuria.

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The Soviets were able to defeat the Kwantung Army in Manchuria and occupy northern Korea, which contributed to Japan's decision to surrender to the Allied forces.

Weaknesses of the Axis Powers

Germany's Military Weaknesses - Hitler's Mistakes (Europe)

Example and Explanation

The Germans made several critical errors in their campaigns, largely due to an inefficient command structure. German commanders constantly had to report back to Hitler, who regularly intervened in military decisions. One example of such is his declaration of war on the United States. Hitler erroneously decided to declare war on the United States four days after the Pearl Harbor attack, despite having no obligation to do so under the terms of the Tripartite Pact signed with Japan and Italy. This move essentially brought the United States, which had been neutral, into the European theatre of war. Germany would now have to contend with the immense amount of resources and military might brought about by the United States, one of the most industrialised countries in the world.

Link

While Hitler may have been a shrewd politician, he had never been a senior military commander. He had little military command experience at the highest level. Thus, the mistakes he made as a result of this inexperience contributed to the Axis defeat in World War 2.

Germany's Military Weaknesses - The Two-Front War (Europe)

Example and Explanation

In WWI, Germany had tried to avoid a war on two fronts – against Russia in the east and against Britain and France in the west. In 1940, Hitler successfully fought a single-front war against Britain and France, but he failed to defeat Britain. When he invaded the USSR in 1941, he placed Germany in a two-front war. This prevented him from concentrating his efforts and resources on a single front. It could even be argued that Germany was fighting on three fronts if we consider the Allied bombing campaign. Besides, Germany was not just facing Britain on the Western Front, but the United States for most of the war.

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Thus by allowing the war to become a two-front war, the Germans put themselves in the position of being gradually worn down by the Allied forces. This strongly contributed to the Allied victory in World War 2.

Germany's Military Weaknesses - Poor Planning (Europe)

Explanation and Link (Naval Warfare)

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

Link (Naval Warfare)

These weaknesses in its navy led Germany to defeat in 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 World War 2.

Explanation and Link (Air Power)

Germany suffered from poor planning in regards to its air force. From 1942 to 1945, the RAF and the US Air Force bombed Germany relentlessly. The Germans never developed heavy bombers like 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.

Link (Air Power)

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.

Japan's Military Weaknesses - Inter-Service Rivalry (The Asia-Pacific)

Example and Explanation

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 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.

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

Japan's Military Weaknesses - Overstretched Empire (The Asia-Pacific)

Example and Explanation

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.

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

Japan's Military Weaknesses - Poor Planning (The Asia-Pacific)

Example and Explanation

The Japanese failed to understand that the war at sea had changed by 1941. Air power, in the form of aircraft based on carriers, was now far more important than traditional naval power like battleships. Therefore, while the Japanese damaged US battleships during the attack on Pearl Harbor, 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.

Link

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

Japan's Military Weaknesses - Lack of Local Support (The Asia-Pacific)

Examples and Explanation

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 guerrilla campaign which gradually wore down the Japanese.

Link

This lack of local support within its empire meant that the Japanese could not effectively extract the resources it needed from its the territory 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 Japanese empire was put at a disadvantage and contributed to its defeat by the Allies.