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HISTORY

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HOW TO LOSE A WAR

Victory into defeat in World War II

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In the Spring of 1941 Adolf Hitler ruled over a vast empire, rich in resources and with a population greater than that of the United States; his Axis ally, Japan, ruled over an empire that was even larger in size. The war, it seemed, was won.



And then they lose it all.

In five themed episodes, we look at the numerous missteps that turned the Axis powers' devastating victories into crushing defeats.

Archive footage is the primary illustration of how the war was lost. The series offers a fresh perspective on the story of 1939-1945. Expert interviews with contributors from military, economic and political history, contemporary footage of key locations, historical documentation and graphics/animation reveal the facts, figures, tactics and flaws in weapons design that explain bad decisions, mistaken appointments and catastrophic failures.

THE EPISODES

Episode One – The men who gave the orders

From Japan's invasion of China in 1937 to the final surrender in September 1945 we examine the decisions of the men who gave the orders that influenced the outcome of the war.



Tens of millions of personnel around the world fought the war on land and sea on every continent. But the outcome of the war was in the hands of very few. How did the



judgement, the whim, of Hitler, or Mussolini affect the course of the war? What was the role of their principal lieutenants? Did loyalty and flattery elevate into command people of monumental incompetence? What of their battlefield commanders? In battlefields on land, sea and air was the war won by better generals, or was it lost by incompetent commanders?

Episode Two – The best-laid plans

Modern war is complicated. The best laid plans often have unseen and disastrous effects, ones that can lose a war.



The attritional nature of modern war is the first price to pay for heavy defeat – can losses in materiel suffered on the battlefield be made good? Or the personnel be replaced? Does the loss of territory impact on continuing the war? What of lost resources, lost support,

declining confidence at home? And what steps were taken by the Axis powers to feed the war machine, with Japan getting bogged-down in China and Germany's failure to resolve its war with Britain in 1940 and then stumbling into an arm-wrestle with the Soviet Union.

But Episode Two also looks, for contrast and comparison, at the allies: what war had they planned for? How did they respond to its realities. To understand how one apparently triumphant side of the conflict went down to defeat we have to understand how the other rose to victory.



Episode Three – Conquering heroes

By the middle of 1941 both Germany and Japan had conquered and established their rule over vast territories. And both had, in most cases, been welcomed as liberators – Germany through



Eastern Europe as liberators from Soviet control, Japan in Asia as liberators from colonial rule. That support had the potential to translate into active support for the ongoing conflict – support that could have added numbers to their armed forces and local knowledge and resources to their war efforts. Both countries comprehensively

threw away the potential. Both, as occupying powers, rapidly transformed from conquering hero to oppressive villain.

By telling the story of how the Axis powers treated – and thus alienated – the populations of the territories they conquered we highlight what is in many respects the most obvious way in which victory was turned into defeat.

Episode Four – The right tools

Modern war is a machine war – Stalin said “artillery is the God of war”. From re-armament decisions taken before the war began through to priorities that were being implemented until



the last weeks of combat, the Axis policies of weapons design and manufacture reveal numerous examples of error.

The Germans had no long-range bomber, the Japanese had not built a means of defending the inbound shipping on which it depended, the Axis army that invaded the Soviet Union

was not the highly mechanised modern army of myth – it depended on 600,000 horses.

Towards the end of the war Germany was diverting resources that could have produced aircraft



and submarines in influential numbers to the development of rockets (the V1 and V2) and jet aircraft which could not be produced in any meaningful quantity.

Finally, though it is a simplification to say that ‘an army marches on its stomach’, it is not without significant truth. And the Axis powers were consistently defective in supporting their fighting troops. The Wehrmacht marched into and then suffered in Russia with no winter clothing or equipment and in the Pacific, where each American combat soldier was supported by eighteen personnel (medical, transport, commissary etc) the ratio for Japanese was 1:1. As a result the majority of Japanese military deaths were not from combat, but from disease and starvation.

Episode Five – The Home Front

Finally, modern war involves everyone. It may be that the civilian experience is no more



intrusive than rationing, or sending the young away as evacuees, but modern war touches everyone. And in the Second World War it is a heavy touch – more civilians were killed than combatants in uniform. Protection from bombing, adequate food supply, sufficient shelter and heating, inspirational leadership, sustaining belief in the news even knowing

that it is censored – the ingredients of civilian morale are numerous. When morale falls, rule continues by force and in all the Axis powers it became more oppressive, more violent as the tide ran against.

Although Roosevelt’s Casablanca declaration that only “unconditional surrender” could end the war meant that populations in Germany and Japan (Italy overthrew Mussolini in 1943) had somehow to keep going, the failure of their governments to sustain hope and security did translate into lowering morale in the workforce and in the armed services.