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# The Round Tablette

*Founding Editor: James W. Gerber, MD (1951–2009)*

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**Welcome to the February session of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table.** Tonight's speaker is Jim Lacey, defense analyst and author of *The Washington War* and *Keep From All Thoughtful Men*, who will discuss the struggles between the advisors of President Franklin Roosevelt and the efforts to pay for the cost of War.

Economists and operations research specialists do not normally make the history books and do not lead grand fleets but they help to provide the wherewithal of those grand fleets and armies. In World War II, the economists, military logisticians, and corporate managers serving in government worked, often with labor leaders, to achieve surprising feats of preparedness, production, and delivery of the tools of war. Our enemies woefully underestimated our abilities as economists, as well as the producers of weapons (toothpaste yes, guns no), just as they did our will to fight. Deriding America as a "mongrel nation" divided by Jim Crow lynchings and religious and ethnic bigotry, the dictators (Stalin as much as Mussolini, Hitler, or Tojo) were quite surprised at the degree to which Americans came together across the color line (and segregated units) to design, produce, deliver, and effectively use armies, air forces, and navies.

The Great Depression spawned President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, which did not cure the economy but did begin building the navy of 1942. After all, reasoned the anti-militarists, ships take time and money to build, then you break them up and build them again, another make-work project of the Civil (later Public) Works Administration. In 1934, Congress authorized (in the Trammel-Vinson Act) expansion of the navy to treaty-authorized levels. While the army was badly funded, it was able to experiment with tanks and mechanized forces and later received funding for aircraft design and for some production. Learning from the failures of mobilization and logistics in the American Expeditionary Force, the army especially began planning for the next deployment overseas. The 1919 Transcontinental Motor Convoy's agonizing passage over the "Lincoln Highway" from Washington, D.C. to San Francisco highlighted

the need for dependable trucks and the army began planning the mechanization of its logistics train. One early student in the new (1924) Army Industrial College was Major Dwight D. Eisenhower (1933).

As the Europeans sped down the road to war, Americans argued about preparedness for war (Charles A. Lindbergh and the America First Committee opposed the administration) and hindered efforts to build up the army and aid the western democracies. Some industries, notably automobiles, were very resistant to calls to convert their production lines to war production, and most did so only after the Pearl Harbor attack. Henry Ford continued his resistance, but Edsel took Ford Motor Company to war at Willow Run among other places.

We learned from the failures of the Great War and did not create a supreme economic war council as our Allies did, but we did organize the effort using civilian administrative agencies run by a combination of federal bureaucrats (economists) and corporate executives and managers. The army and navy were not part of these agencies. Their overlapping and conflicting jurisdictional claims produced in-fighting and gridlock that was adjudicated by FDR himself, effectively providing him with overall control of the economic effort. Combining business, labor, and government managers without military officers meant only FDR could impose direction upon the military's procurement efforts and the direction of economic activity.

Following the 1940 National Emergency, we began enlarging the armed forces and producing new weapons, vehicles, aircraft, and vessels. The dictators, lulled by low depression era figures were amazed by how fast we expanded production and the volume of production – quite probably they did not really believe their informants. As examples, during the course of the war, the US produced over 11 million rifles, two and half million military trucks, 141 aircraft carriers, and 35,000 heavy bombers (four engine) and 34 million tons of merchant shipping, to name just a few categories. By 1945 half of global war production was in the United States.

Measuring this output, and the inputs necessary, were possible because we began collecting aggregate national economic data in calendar year 1929, just in time to measure the im-

**If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns** – contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or [coldpatton@yahoo.com](mailto:coldpatton@yahoo.com)

pacts of the Great Depression. The same data allowed economists and policymakers to choose how to finance and pay for all these wartime expenditures. Collecting data at the firm level, for the first time we had some idea of national industrial capacity and its locations, as well as where the necessary skilled labor was. While few actually advised the President and the Cabinet directly, many economists contributed to the data and analyses underlying that advice.

Sometimes the decisions had less to do with economics and more to do with creating an atmosphere of common cause and common sacrifice. FDR's sons served in harms way; neither wealth nor fame kept the draft away, and Jimmy Stewart (bomber pilot) and Clark Gable (aerial gunner/observer) both served in the 8th Air Force. Other men with special knowledge and training (nuclear physics) were exempt from the draft to work in lovely Los Alamos. The nationwide speed limit of 35 mph, to "save" gasoline, actually helped limit tire wear. Tires were made from rubber from the Dutch East Indies – now under Japanese management. Rationing of household items and food to generate a sense of common sacrifice meant a personal diet significantly greater than during the depression. VICTORY GARDENS, local scrap drives to collect aluminum and other metals, collecting fat for ammunition production all played roles, some for production, some for morale. Hollywood's major studios turned out morale building motion pictures and stars volunteered for USO tours. Walt Disney's animators produced training films for the armed forces and Donald Duck and Bugs Bunny joined the fight against Hirohito and the Führer in numerous cartoons.

Central planning was wholly absent, centralized guidance was the norm. We created a huge logistics infrastructure to fight two wars, both logistically daunting. Just to get to the fight, we had to first invest in the support and supply vessels and infrastructure, produce the goods, and train the men, and then move all the men and their equipment (from typewriters to chaplain's gear) to staging bases before any shot was fired. The English joked that their island would sink because of all the American materiel stockpiled there for D-Day.

Central planners did not account for the technical expertise of the average American service man, who knew how to keep a Model A running and had no problem fixing a broken down jeep. The planners did create thousands of military technical schools, almost over-night, and thousands of pilots, navigators, radiomen, medical technicians, and other specialists were churned out.

#### FURTHER READINGS:

Jim Lacey, *Keep From All Thoughtful Men: How U.S. Economists Won World War II* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2011).  
 Maury Klein, *A Call To Arms: Mobilizing American for World War II* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013).  
 Mark A. Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries: The Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Grand Alliance, and U.S. Strategy in World War II* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).  
 Paul A.C. Koistinen, *Arsenal of World War II: The Political Economy of American Warfare, 1940-1945* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004).  
 Adam Tooze, *Wages of Destruction* (London: Viking Press, 2006).

#### Announcements:

Vietnam War Roundtable - 18 Feb. 2019 - "*Vietnam War 360*" - [mnvietnam.org](http://mnvietnam.org) - [rldietrich@mnmilitarymuseum.org](mailto:rldietrich@mnmilitarymuseum.org)  
 Twin Cities Civil War Round Table - 19 Feb. 2019 - *Oliver Winchester in the Civil War* - [www.tccwrt.com](http://www.tccwrt.com) - [info@tccwrt.com](mailto:info@tccwrt.com)  
 St. Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - 25 Feb. 2019 - *Colville and Hubbard* - 715-386-1268 - [rossandhaines@comcast.net](mailto:rossandhaines@comcast.net)  
 Civil War Symposium - 6 Apr. 2019 - [info@tccwrt.com](mailto:info@tccwrt.com)  
 Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345 - 320-616-6050 - <http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>  
 Minnesota Air Guard Museum - 612-713-2523 - [www.mnangmuseum.org](http://www.mnangmuseum.org)  
 8th AF Historical Society of MN, KC Hall Bloomington, Wednesdays at 1130 - <https://www.8thmn.org>.  
 Friends of Ft. Snelling - [www.fortsnelling.org](http://www.fortsnelling.org)  
 World Without Genocide - 651-695-7621 - <http://www.worldwithoutgenocide.org/>  
 Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN - Air show - 20 June 2020 - 320-564-6644 - <http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org>.  
 Wings of the North Airshow - Eden Prairie - 13-14 July 2019 - 952-746-6100 - [www.wotn.org](http://www.wotn.org)  
 Military History Book Club, Har Mar Barnes & Noble - 27 Feb. 2019 - Horne, *Hubris: The Tragedy of War ...* - [sdaubenspeck52@gmail.com](mailto:sdaubenspeck52@gmail.com)  
 Winston Churchill Book Club - [lin.hopkins@hotmail.com](mailto:lin.hopkins@hotmail.com)  
 Alliance Francaise 612-332-0436 - [www.afmsp.org](http://www.afmsp.org) -  
 Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - 651-338-2717 - [crazyjer-ry45@hotmail.com](mailto:crazyjer-ry45@hotmail.com)  
 CAF - Commemorative Air Force - 651-455-6942 - [www.cafmn.org](http://www.cafmn.org)

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**We need volunteers to drive our veterans to and from meetings. Please contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or [coldpatton@yahoo.com](mailto:coldpatton@yahoo.com)**

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#### Round Table Schedule 2019

14 Mar.	Combined Bomber Offensive (change)
28 Mar.	WASPs
11 Apr.	General with Six Stars: J. H. C. Lee
9 May	D-Day

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