
The Round Tablette

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Welcome to the second October session of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table.

Tonight's speakers are Terrance Furgerson, author of *The Dallas Story*, who will discuss the explosion of aircraft production in Texas, and Bruce Kitt who will talk about the World War II B-24 Modification Center in St Paul.

Economists and operations research specialists neither make the history books nor 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, 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 New Deal's Civil (later Public) Works Administration. begin building the Navy of 1942 in the 1934 Trammel-Vinson Act and the badly funded army experimented 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 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 led the army to begin planning the mechanization of its logistics train

As the Europeans sped down the road to war, Charles A. Lindbergh and the America First Committee hindered efforts to build up the army and aid the western democracies. Some industries, notably automobiles, remained 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.

Having learned from the failures of the Great War, the United States organized the effort using civilian administrative agencies run by a combination of federal bureaucrats (economists) and corporate executives and managers. Their overlapping and conflicting jurisdictional claims produced infighting and gridlock that was adjudicated by FDR himself, effectively providing him with overall control of the economic effort and direction of the military's procurement efforts.

Following the 1940 National Emergency, we began enlarging the armed forces, 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. Mass production proved to be the ultimate weapon in the American war machine. 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 impacts 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 harm's 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, New Mexico. 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

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

– 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.

While 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. Every state in the Union benefited from the industrial expansion during the war, California, Florida Texas, Washington and even Minnesota had aircraft plants or modification centers. American materiel did not have to be perfect, perfection proved too costly in time and money, it just had to be between good and really good. The English often 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 created thousands of military technical schools, almost over-night, and thousands of pilots, navigators, radiomen, medical technicians, and other specialists were churned out.

The vast amounts of materiel being turned out, coincided with the social change going on in America and a focal point of that was in Detroit, Michigan, the heart of wartime production. African-Americans from the Southern states moved north in search of lucrative paying jobs and a better life, but along with them came the poor southern whites. The overt racial tensions that had been a part of the southern culture since the end of the American Civil War moved north. African-Americans were no longer willing to take a back seat and realized the hypocrisy of fighting Adolf Hitler's racial policies while enduring segregation at home. A. Phillip Randolph, a black labor union and civil rights leader, proposed a march on Washington in 1943 to highlight the injustices of the times, but FDR placated him with the beginnings of desegregation policies in federal work places. But these small steps would be just beginning.

The effects of military logistics and domestic economic mass production will never be the center of the stories of World War II, but the symbiotic relationship between the soldiers on the battlefield and the materiel produced provided a winning combination.

FURTHER READINGS:

Terrance Furgerson, *The Dallas Story: The North American Aviation Plant and Industrial Mobilization During World War II* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2023).

Maury Klein, *A Call to Arms* (New York: Bloomsburg Press, 2015).

David Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Arthur Herman, *Freedoms Forge: How American Business Produced Victory in World War II* (New York: Random House, 2012).

A.J. Baime *The Arsenal of Democracy* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin Harcourt, 2015).

Paul A.C. Koistinen *Arsenal of WWII: The Political Economy of American Warfare, 1939-1945* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

Announcements:

Twin Cities Civil War Round Table – 19 Nov. 2024, *Lincoln & the Dakota Uprising* – www.tccwrt.com - info@tccwrt.com

Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345 - 320-616-6050. <http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>.

8th AF Historical Society of MN, KC Hall Bloomington, 2nd & 4th Wednesdays at 1100 - <https://www.8thmn.org>.

Friends of Ft. Snelling - www.fortsnelling.org

Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN - Air show – TBA 2025 – 320-564-6644

<http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org>.

Wings of the North Airshow - Eden Prairie –TBA 2025 - Flying Cloud Airport - 952-746-6100 - www.wotn.org

Alliance Française 612-332-0436 - www.afmisp.org

Friends of the National WW II Memorial – <http://www.wwiimemorialfriends.org>

Pittsburg Veterans Breakfast Club

- <http://www.vbcphg.org>.

Western Naval Historical Association –

info@wnha.net

WWII Discussion Forum – [wwiidf.org](http://www.wwiidf.org)

CAF - Commemorative Air Force - 651-455-6942 - www.cafmn.org

Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - 651-338-2717

- jkyser45@gmail.com

We need volunteers to drive our veterans to and from meetings. Please contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

Round Table Schedule 2024-2025

2024

13 Nov. Just War & WWII (2nd Wednesday)

10 Dec. Battle of the Bulge

2025

14 Jan. Gliders & Computers in WWII

11 Feb. Ghost Army

11 Mar. Women at War in WWII

25 Mar. Submarines at Midway

8 Apr. 11th Airborne Division

13 May Patton's Tactician: War and Occupation

The Round Table is a 501.c.3 non-profit.

We would greatly appreciate your supporting the HCDWW2RT.