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Why The Allies Won



Synopsis

"Overy has written a masterpiece of analytical history, posing and answering one of the great questions of the century." —Sunday Times (London) Richard Overy's bold book begins by throwing out the stock answers to this great question: Germany doomed itself to defeat by fighting a two-front war; the Allies won by "sheer weight of material strength." In fact, by 1942 Germany controlled almost the entire resources of continental Europe and was poised to move into the Middle East. The Soviet Union had lost the heart of its industry, and the United States was not yet armed. The Allied victory in 1945 was not inevitable. Overy shows us exactly how the Allies regained military superiority and why they were able to do it. He recounts the decisive campaigns: the war at sea, the crucial battles on the eastern front, the air war, and the vast amphibious assault on Europe. He then explores the deeper factors affecting military success and failure: industrial strength, fighting ability, the quality of leadership, and the moral dimensions of the war. Photographs

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Customer Reviews

Historian Richard Overy sets out to answer what is one of the most important questions of the Twentieth Centuries, why the Allied Powers, and not the Axis, won the greatest conflict of all time. Overy emphasizes that the outcome was not a foregone conclusion, as Western Liberal societies have argued since 1945. Rather, the conflict was extremely close, and in the years from 1942-44, the war could have gone either way. Overy divides his analysis into two types of factors: the actual combat, including campaigns and tactics, and underlying factors, such as economics, resources, and leadership. Overy does more than simply rehash other historians' arguments while synthesizing

them into one coherent work. For example, he maintains that the Eastern Front was the most important single front in determining the outcome of the war. At Stalingrad the Soviets won not only by sheer numbers, but by tactical superiority as well. But Stalingrad did not decide the outcome of the campaign. The German lines stabilized in 1943, and had Hitler not wasted all his heavy armor at Kursk, stalemate may have ensued. Overy also discussed the Anglo-American air war, which had little impact in 1942-43, but when the allied forces targeted the German industrial areas, they pulverized the German munitions manufacturing, so that in early 1945 Albert Speer conceded the war was over from his point of view. The sea war in the Atlantic is also examined. Germany's U-Boats nearly strangled England in the early stages, striking American and British ships at will. But American technology and ingenuity changed the tide, forcing the U-Boats to retreat after taking massive losses. All of these campaigns were close affairs, in which the allied forces made better choices than their Axis counterparts.

This is an interesting work, and it helps one to rethink questions about the war one would have thought settled. On paper the military forces of Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union vastly overwhelm those of Germany, Italy and Japan. One would think that military victory was assured. Richard Overy questions these assumptions in this useful book. After all from 1940 to 1944 Germany had most of the resources of continental Europe to draw upon. If the gap between the two sides seems so vast, it is partially because Germany did not take full advantage of those resources when it could have crushed the other sides. Overy provides particular attention on the battle for the seas when it appeared up until mid 1943 that the Axis might cut the lifeline across the Atlantic, and when the battle of Midway turned for the Americans on the space of a few lucky minutes. He discusses such major events as D-Day and gives due attention to the vital battle for Russia, without which Allied victory would have seemed impossible. Crucial to this account is the economic side, however, and here Overy challenges two important scholarly opinions about the war. The first view, which developed in the sixties, looked at the relatively low levels of arms that the Germans produced, theorized that German war production was limited because of a need to placate German living standards. Because of this restriction Germany turned towards the devastating and hopefully quick strategy of blitzkrieg. The second view argued that aerial bombing was of limited success because German war production still rose from 1942 to 1945. Overy, however, argues that Hitler did not sacrifice guns for butter but always wanted a fierce military regime.

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