

**THE MYTHS OF WORLD WAR TWO**

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In the 75 plus years since the end of WWII, many writers have commented on certain alternative scenarios or what are called counterfactuals which postulate that if a decision would have been different, if Hitler would have done this or if the Japanese would have done that the war could have turned out differently and the Axis (Germany and her allies plus Japan) could have won the war. Absent some extremely unlikely set of circumstances, I reject them all and feel the war was essentially a foregone conclusion from the beginning. I have stated in the past to whomever was listening that the Japanese lost the war when the first bomb fell at Pearl Harbor and the Germans lost the war when the first soldier stepped across the Soviet border. It was still necessary to fight many bloody battles and suffer serious casualties, but the ultimate outcome was never in doubt. Of course, this is based on 20-20 hindsight and it clearly wasn't that obvious to the people at the time. My thesis is based on three assumptions and if you disagree with these assumptions, you may not accept my conclusions, but I will gladly defend them during the Q & A period. The assumptions are:

1. Even absent something as dramatic as Pearl Harbor, the US would have eventually gotten into the war, certainly the war against Germany and probably the war against Japan. When we talk about Japan, you'll see that Pearl Harbor was more or less inevitable. An undeclared naval war had been raging in the Atlantic for months and it would have only taken a few more "incidents" to spark a real war with Germany. It would have been messy and initially the country wouldn't have been as united as it was after December 7, 1941, but the U S would have been in the war.
2. Japan transformed itself from a feudal society in the mid-19th century into a modern industrial power by 1900 and continued that process up through the beginning of WW II. However, the society, at least the elites who ran things, were hobbled by refusing to update their Samurai or Bushido Code which glorified the warrior. What was relevant for a society that fought man to man with swords wasn't updated for modern mechanized warfare. Examples are the idea that a fallen warrior is disgraced and that the motivation and bravery of a warrior will override any technological elements. For this reason, the Japanese did not set up any organized program to rescue downed pilots and often threw soldiers ashore but made little provision for logistical support. Since the proper opponent of a warrior was another warrior, they refused to utilize their large and efficient submarine fleet to prey on enemy commerce, preferring to seek out enemy warships. They also refused to initiate a convoy system as it was beneath the dignity of a warship to simply guard a convoy and as a result their merchant fleet was devastated. They also had a superiority complex and felt that the normal rules of morality did not apply to them. The Sino-Japanese war of 1894 and the Russo-Japanese war of 1904 both started with sneak attacks so Pearl Harbor was very consistent with their history. Even given the above problems with the Bushido Code, the Japanese economy just wasn't prepared for anything other than a short war and they would have lost eventually no matter what assuming the Americans were willing to hang in and accept sacrifices in order to achieve ultimate victory. On a side note, I attended a 2019 WWI symposium in Kansas City and had breakfast with a retired naval officer who had written several books on naval affairs in WWI and WWII. Without mentioning specifically that I was planning to give this

talk, I discussed with him the idea of the Japanese myopia concerning the Bushido Code and he agreed with me 100%.

3. During my extremely undistinguished military career, the highest rank I ever reached was that of Corporal which was the same rank achieved by Adolph Hitler. We share one common experience but hopefully not any others. One thing for sure is that I have always considered myself very rational whereas Hitler was not a rational individual. Many of the WWII counterfactuals begin with a statement that "If Hitler would have listened to his generals, he could have won the war." This ignores what actually happened in the prewar period where every one of his great triumphs (the occupation of the Rhineland, the Anschluss with Austria and the Czech crisis) were violently opposed by the German high command but in each case, Hitler guessed correctly, and the generals were wrong. This fed Hitler's already outsized ego and convinced him that he was an agent of Providence and his decisions based on his superior intuition were always correct. When later in the war he made some admittedly bad decisions this was based on his contempt for the professional military tinged with class conflict in that the vast majority of high-ranking German officers were Prussian aristocrats while Hitler himself had a middle-class background. And in fact, some of his decisions such as the stand fast order in December 1941, done against the advice of the general staff, are now conceded to be correct. Much has been made of Hitler's unilateral declaration of war on the United States the day after Pearl Harbor. He was under no obligation to do this as the Japanese hadn't consulted him before launching the attack, but it was a heaven-sent gift to Roosevelt and the Americans as they didn't have to bother talking the American people into a war with Germany. While this was a catastrophic mistake on the part of Hitler, I don't think it would really have mattered in the end for the reasons discussed above but it would have made things messy for Roosevelt. I will discuss three myths of the war against Germany and two related to Japan. The German myths concern Dunkirk and Sea Lion, Operation Barbarossa, and the Afrika Corps.

### **The Myth of Dunkirk and Sea Lion**

After Hitler occupied the rump of Czechoslovakia in early 1939, the Western Allies finally wised up and gave a guarantee to Poland, Germany's obvious next victim. This despite the fact that it was realistically impossible for the French and British to give any meaningful aid to the Poles, especially after the signing of the German-Soviet non-aggression pact in August 1939. After the declaration of war nothing happened for the next eight months in an episode called the Sietzkreig or Phony War. This changed on May 10, 1940 when Hitler attacked all along the Western Front. There was another dispute with his generals, most of whom wanted a repeat of the Schliffien Plan of 1914, moving through Belgium to attack the French head on. Certain junior officers especially Erich Von Manstein, one of the most brilliant German generals in the war, proposed a much bolder plan which called for an armored thrust through the so-called impassible Ardennes in the middle of the French line and a dash to the coast. This was adopted and resulted in a smashing success.

The French positioned their best units along with virtually the entire BEF (British Expeditionary Force) on the Belgian border with orders to advance immediately upon the

outbreak of hostilities. In effect this played directly into the hands of the Germans as the best Allied units were now cut off in the north after the panzers reached the coast. They began to fall back in great disorder to the channel ports, especially Dunkirk. Then with the advance German elements just outside of Dunkirk, Hitler issued the famous (or infamous) halt order. In some respects, I consider this the most plausible of the various counterfactuals but there were good reasons for the order. The Germans had advanced over 200 miles in a week; the tanks were badly in need of refit and the men even though their morale was sky high were exhausted. Many reasons have been given for the halt order such as Hitler's admiration for the British Empire or Goering's jealousy of the Army. However, it's obvious to me that the rationale involved the need for rest and refit of the troops and equipment and an unsuccessful British counterattack at Arras on May 21st. The bulk of the BEF was otherwise engaged but parts of three divisions pressed the attack and the German high command was thrown into panic. The French were supposed to assist in the attack from the south, but their chaotic command situation prevented this. If the attack would have succeeded, instead of cutting off the Allies, the Germans would in turn have been cut off. Therefore, the high command convinced Hitler to halt the advance elements and bring up German infantry to strengthen the flanks of the breakthrough. Several generals with the advanced panzer elements such as Heinz Guderian bitterly protested the halt order, but they were overruled by the high command. The halt order gave the British and French time to form a defensive line and enable the "Miracle of Dunkirk" (which involved the evacuation of the BEF and thousands of French troops) to take place. There is no guarantee that the lack of a halt order would have led to the capture of the BEF as the Germans also used the two-day halt to replenish and refit their forces and armored units are notoriously ineffective when attacking fortified positions that cannot be turned. We'll see this again in front of Moscow in 1941.

That segues into the Myth of Sea Lion, the never executed amphibious invasion of Britain. It is often said by revisionist historians that if an invasion would have followed up right after the eviction of the BEF from the continent, the British would have been too disorganized to resist. This ignores the fact that an amphibious invasion cannot be planned on the fly (the D-Day invasion took two years of planning) and absolutely no one in the German high command anticipated the scope of initial success so an immediate follow up invasion couldn't possibly have been planned. In fact, the opposing forces at the beginning of the campaign were evenly matched and on paper the Allies had more and far superior tanks, but they were not used properly; the overall quality of the German tanks at this stage of the war was very poor but correct tactical use of them covered up these shortcomings. There was no way for the people at the time to assume the overwhelming success of the initial attack. The Germans also had no special landing craft and were forced to assemble a motley "invasion fleet" from river barges gathered from all over occupied Northern Europe. These barges would have been very unseaworthy in the treacherous waters of the English Channel and many would have floundered. The Germans did try an amphibious invasion of Crete in 1941 where they sent troops in open boats from the Greek mainland. Despite a serious lack of Allied air cover this invasion fleet was massacred by the British Mediterranean fleet. Crete was conquered but the main factor was an airborne assault that was very costly against a disorganized Greek/British/Commonwealth mixed force. The Germans had nowhere

near enough airborne forces in 1940 to use as the main factor in an invasion of Britain and the Royal Air Force was much stronger than the air assets available in Crete

Two absolutely necessary elements of a successful amphibious invasion are complete control of the sea and air. The German Navy, never very powerful to begin with, was devastated in the Battle of Norway and the Luftwaffe (German air force) never had complete control of the air. Weather was also a factor as by the time even an improvised invasion fleet could be gathered fall weather was beginning which make a successful invasion even more hazardous. There is a reason that the Allied D-Day invasion occurred in early June 1944 as any other time was not conducive to good weather. The Luftwaffe was not set up as a strategic bombing force but an adjunct to the land operations and was unsuited for the type of mission required in the Battle of Britain. An example involved the German Stuka dive bomber which had been highly effective in close support of ground operations in the Polish and French campaigns where the Germans had local air superiority in almost all cases. They were used in the early stages of the Battle of Britain but proved so vulnerable to the RAF fighters that they were withdrawn. Suddenly the German bomber force was reduced by a third. Once it became obvious that the air war could not be won and the weather turned bad, Hitler demobilized the invasion fleet and turned his attention eastward.

### **The Myth of Barbarossa**

Hitler had always contemplated an invasion of the Soviet Union as he was rabidly anti-Communist. This was one of the primary themes in his book *Mein Kampf* which was written in 1923. He considered Bolshevism as another manifestation of a Jewish plot to take over the world, even though this was completely at odds with the traditional view of Jews as blood-sucking capitalists; another example of the illogic behind much of anti-Semitism.

There is a theory that Stalin was planning an invasion of his own and Barbarossa (code name for the invasion) preempted his plans. Even if this is true (and I don't believe it was) the Soviet Army was placed too far forward and a sitting duck for the initial German assault. Hundreds of thousands of Soviet troops were encircled and either annihilated or surrendered. However, the Soviet Union is like a funnel and the farther you go the wider the front becomes and therefore requires more troops. The logistics of such an invasion are a nightmare as the totally inadequate Soviet transportation network had to supply an ever-widening front. Stalin was in a state of shock for the first few weeks and the Red Army was severely weakened by the purge of most senior officers in the late 1930's. It can be said that the great success achieved in the early part of the invasion was due far more to incredible ineptitude on the part of Stalin and the high command rather than German tactical brilliance.

One of the most persistent criticisms/counterfactuals is the redeployment of the Second Panzer Group in September from the Moscow front to assist in the reduction of the so-called Kiev pocket. This resulted in the capture of 650,000 Soviet prisoners but it did ease the pressure on Moscow and give Stalin time to strengthen his defenses. However, if the Kiev pocket had not been closed these 650,000 soldiers would have been available for

subsequent operations including the defense of Moscow. Also, hundreds of thousands of veteran Siberian troops were moved to the Moscow front and assisted in the December Soviet counteroffensive. If the direct attack on Moscow would have continued without the diversion to the south, these troops would have been available for the defense of the city. It's also a fact that armored formations are far less effective when used to attack fixed fortifications, especially in a crowded city, where their ability to maneuver and outflank the opposition is severely limited. Another example is the city of Leningrad, which held out for almost three years against determined German assaults

The Soviets had only one active front once the Japanese had decided to strike south rather than assist Hitler by attacking the Soviets in Siberia. This enabled Stalin to shift troops from the East to the West. On the other hand, the Germans were forced to garrison all the occupied territory of Western Europe, Norway, and the Balkans. This was later expanded to Africa and then Italy. The Nazis tried to portray the invasion as a European-wide crusade against Bolshevism and the Waffen SS did recruit units from all the occupied territories. However, these units were under strength and of very dubious quality. Given that the Soviets had a tremendous population advantage to begin with, this diffusion of German power was a major problem. Hitler also followed his racist inclinations by not attempting to rally disaffected Soviet minorities, especially the Ukrainians, to his banner and in fact was forced to use combat troops to counter partisan activity behind the German lines. The Soviet winter was certainly a factor but even before that the onset of fall turned most roads to mud and negatively impacted the German motorized formations. Despite the widespread belief that they possessed unlimited manpower but obsolete equipment, the Soviet KV-1 and T-34 tanks were far superior to anything in the German arsenal until 1943. For all these reasons it was not realistic for the Germans to ever succeed in an invasion and certainly not once the initial offensive had failed and the United States joined the war.

### **The Myth of the Afrika Korps**

Some more fanciful counterfactual advocates will talk about a major Axis effort in Africa which would have involved a heavy German effort in the Western Desert resulting in the capture of the Suez Canal and then an advance either north through the Levant (Palestine and Syria) to seize the Soviet Caucasus oil fields or a move East to capture the Middle East oil fields. These are laughable as Hitler always was concentrating on the Soviet Union and had no significant forces available for this theatre. When he did commit large forces during the Tunisian campaign, they could not be supplied even the short distance from Sicily. Supplying forces much further east in Egypt or God help us the Caucasus or the Middle East was impossible. Until Tunisia in 1943 the Axis forces in Africa were 80% Italian and these were of very questionable effectiveness. In some respects, the counterfactual advocates will just look at a map and assume that the Axis forces could just advance while ignoring logistical considerations.

Mussolini wanted to get something out of the war before it was over, which he felt would happen soon after the German breakthrough and the collapse of the French army, so he declared war on the Western Allies in June 1940. His attack on France across the Alps was a disaster but in late 1940 he advanced across the Libyan border into Egypt. The

Italian initial advance halted after a few miles as the troops were not properly organized, and supplies had to be brought up. The British General O'Connor attacked with a small force and from December 1940 to February 1941 pushed the enemy hundreds of miles back to El Aghelia and captured 135,000 prisoners. Hitler dispatched one of his best generals, Irwin Rommel, with two armored divisions and after the British forces had been weakened by withdrawals for the Greek campaign, the Germans pushed the British all the way back to Mersha Metruh in Egypt with only the fortress of Tobruk holding out. The two forces battled for the rest of 1941 and most of 1942 with Rommel eventually capturing Tobruk and advancing to El Alamein, only 60 miles from Alexandria. However, Rommel was now at the tail end of a very long supply line which was constantly being interrupted by the RAF and Royal Navy, whereas the British were now very close to their supply base. This phenomenon is one of the ironies of modern war; an advance which pushes back the enemy makes the attacker more vulnerable and the defender easier to resupply. In fact, Rommel's best source of supply was captured British stores. The Italian Navy which should have been able to protect the supply convoys spent most of the time in port due to lack of fuel and had also been devastated in November 1940 by an attack on their Taranto naval base by British torpedo bombers. This attack was in many respects a foretaste of Pearl Harbor a year later.

Another factor was the terrain; prior to this Rommel had been able to pin down the British forces at his front with static Italian infantry and then use his German and Italian armor to swing around the allied left flank. The Quattria Depression just south of Alamein was impassable and meant that only frontal assaults were possible which given the wide disparity in troops and materiel made this essentially impossible, especially since the British were able to ship troops and supplies unhindered around the Cape of Good Hope and through the Red Sea or directly from India. Rommel's supply lines stretched hundreds of miles through the open desert and that was only the supplies that actually landed; most were sunk. Since the small existing German forces were unable to be properly supplied it is foolish to think that much larger forces which would have been needed to truly defeat the British would have been realistic. And any further advance was totally out of the question. The British built up their forces and launched a devastating attack in November 1942 which broke the German line and forced Rommel to retreat all the way to Tunisia. Now we'll move to the two Japanese myths; Pearl Harbor and Midway.

### **The Myth of Pearl Harbor**

Before we begin, let's review the overall strategic situation in late 1941. The Japanese were in an intolerable situation, mostly of their own making. The so-called China Incident was bogged down and rather than contemplate a withdrawal which was anathema to the Bushido Code, they decided to push ahead. I don't have time to go into the China Incident but anyone who is curious can raise it as a question. The Western embargo, instituted in mid 1940 after the occupation of French Indo China left Japan needing to acquire key resources, especially oil, rubber and tin which could only be found in Malaya and the Dutch East Indies. Directly in the path of this advance was the American controlled Philippine Islands. It was too much of a gamble to bypass the islands and there was no guarantee that the U S would stand aside if Japan seized British

and Dutch possessions nearby. Thereby a move south meant war with the United States and since the American Pacific fleet was based in Hawaii, a surprise attack there was part of the plan. Even if for some reason the Japanese decided not to attack Pearl Harbor a sneak attack on the Philippines would have generated American casualties and probably almost as much anger as the actual Pearl Harbor attack. Not attacking Pearl Harbor would have left the American fleet intact which would have been foolish if war with America was a given in the equation.

The Americans were fortunate that the key vessels in the fleet, the three aircraft carriers, (Enterprise, Lexington & Saratoga) were not in port at the time of the attack but even if they had been, they could have been repaired within a year (probably far less) as they would have been sunk in shallow water. There were three other carriers (Yorktown, Hornet & Wasp) which could have been transferred from the Atlantic fleet. Plus, the construction of new carriers, already on the drawing board, would have been greatly speeded up. Had the Japanese knocked out the carriers, it would have been very serious in the short run but would not have been an insurmountable impediment to ultimate Allied victory.

A few conspiracy theorists have speculated that the American government was aware that Hawaii would be attacked, given the fact that the Japanese codes had been broken, but deliberately neglected to notify the commanders on the spot so that the country would be united after a surprise sneak attack. This theory assumes that several key people such as Roosevelt, George Marshall, the US Army Commander and Harold Stark, the Chief of Naval operations conspired in this scenario. Roosevelt can be criticized for misleading the American people about his desire to get into the war but it's a wild stretch to assume he would engage in this type of clearly immoral behavior. However, to believe that Marshall and Stark, especially Marshall, would have done such a thing runs counter to their well known integrity. A lesser criticism involves incompetence which was covered up by scapegoating the local commanders, especially Admiral Kimmell. There was some incompetence but it's a stretch to assume it was deliberate and a major factor was the decision to only allow a small group to access the code intercepts in order to prevent our breaking of the code from leaking out. It was also assumed that even though most people felt that the Japanese were going to strike somewhere in late 1941, the idea that a large strike force could sail all across the Pacific Ocean undetected and refuel enroute was not considered realistic or even possible.

Leaving aside the loss of life, the attack on Pearl Harbor was in some sense a strategic net plus for the U S. The battleships sunk or badly damaged were mostly obsolete and their subtraction from the game board essentially settled the issue of the battleship admirals versus the carrier admirals in favor of the latter. The era of the big gun battleship was long gone but not everyone was willing to accept it. The ships sunk were too slow to keep up with the fleet carriers and would have inhibited the kind of hit and run tactics used early in the war. The only major ship to ship battleship engagement of the war was the Battle of the Sirigao Strait during the reconquest of the Philippines in late 1944. The real value of battleships during the war was shore bombardment in support of amphibious invasions. Let's look at what might have happened if Pearl Harbor had not been attacked



or the damage would have been minimal. The official US plan for war with Japan (War Plan Orange) called for the fleet to sail to the defense of the Philippines. Had the fleet not been crippled by the Pearl Harbor attack there would have been tremendous public pressure to assist the brave defenders of Bataan, which is where the defenders of the Philippines made their stand. Had the fleet sailed they would have faced a serious problem of refueling across thousands of miles of ocean and would have been under constant attack by Japanese submarines and slowed down by the obsolete battleships. A full-scale fleet action might have occurred, and the Japanese could possibly have won; all US losses would have been in deep water and the ships lost forever whereas those sunk at Pearl Harbor, except for the Arizona and Oklahoma, were eventually repaired and rejoined the fleet.

Some counterfactuals postulate that if the Japanese had followed up the Pearl Harbor raid with an amphibious invasion of Hawaii, the war would have taken a decisive turn in their favor. In my opinion this is sheer lunacy. Hawaii was thousands of miles from any Japanese base; therefore, no land-based air support was possible and the fleet itself had to withdraw immediately after the raid due to fuel constraints which meant the troops would have been entirely on their own and it boggles the mind as to how this force could have been resupplied. Clearly the U S forces in Hawaii were totally disorganized after the attack but they could have rallied and fought off whatever forces the Japanese could have landed. This hypothetical invasion was far more implausible than Sea Lion.

More significant than anything else was the anger which the surprise attack generated in the American populace and made any kind of negotiated peace completely impossible. Therefore, as Admiral Yamamoto, the commander of the Combined Fleet, told his colleagues before the war, the only way we can win is to dictate terms from the White House, which was clearly impossible.

### **The Myth of Midway**

The Doolittle raid in April 1942 led directly to the Battle of Midway in June. The Japanese were humiliated that the Americans were able to bomb their capital and felt that only a decisive naval battle would end this threat once and for all. They picked Midway, an atoll about a thousand miles northwest of Hawaii. The American fleet would have to come out to defend Midway and virtually the entire Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) would be waiting for them. Unbeknownst to the IJN commanders was the fact that their code had been cracked and the Americans knew they were coming. The carrier Lexington was sunk, and the Yorktown damaged at the Battle of the Coral Sea in May, but the Yorktown was patched up in record time and it sailed out with the Enterprise and Hornet to meet the IJN attack. Given that the Americans knew what the Japanese were doing gave them a tremendous advantage which always has to be kept in mind. Clearly Midway was the turning point of the war as the IJN was never able to launch a credible offensive from that point forward. Four of the six IJN fleet carriers were lost at Midway and were not able to be replaced. In addition, all the aircraft from her four carriers were lost and most of the pilots as they had nowhere to land even if they hadn't been shot down.

This highlighted another serious shortcoming of the Bushido code. The front-line Japanese carrier pilots were the best in the world in 1941 but no organized system of replacements was ever established. Later in the war serious shortages of aviation fuel made it even more difficult for the replacements to obtain adequate flight time and their quality suffered greatly. Japanese aircraft, especially the Zero fighter, were excellent but only when handled by an experienced pilot. The Zero was fast and maneuverable but had very little protection. Absent a trained pilot, they were sitting ducks for the heavily armored U S planes.

Many of the counterfactuals relating to Midway pertain to the "luck" involved in the American victory. However, some of this luck also represented calamitous mistakes by the IJN commander, Admiral Nagumo. The presence of the American fleet was not discovered until the Japanese aircraft had returned from a raid on Midway and were in the process of rearming for a second attack. However, once the American fleet was discovered, the planes needed to be rearmed with armor piercing bombs versus the high explosive kind used to attack the island of Midway. The Japanese did not know that the Americans already had planes in the air to attack their fleet and committed the cardinal sin of carrier warfare, rearming and refueling planes on deck rather than below decks to save time. This meant that ordnance and fuel were strewn all over the flight decks making them sitting ducks for the American bombers. To complicate matters the IJN combat air patrol (CAP) was busy fighting off American torpedo bombers which by definition come in at a low altitude. The American torpedo bombers were decimated but the CAP was unavailable to fight off dive bombers which appeared at that exact moment attacking from a much higher altitude. A few well-placed bombs quickly sank two carriers as the bombs and fuel on the decks rapidly escalated into an inferno. A third carrier was sunk shortly thereafter and the fourth later in the day.

Clearly the timing of these events was very fortuitous for the Americans but poor damage control by the IJN also contributed. One American carrier, the Yorktown, was lost but it absorbed a tremendous amount of damage before sinking and had been weakened by the Coral Sea battle. Even if the Japanese commander had not rearmed his planes on deck, it is likely the Americans would have scored some hits and at least one IJN carrier would probably have been sunk. The American commander would never have exposed his fleet in the same manner and superior damage control would have made it highly unlikely that any more than one or two American carriers would have been sunk under any circumstances. In fact, the Yorktown had been hit earlier in the battle and when the Japanese planes retired, the carrier was burning heavily but the fires were quickly doused, and she was put back in service. When another fleet of Japanese planes appeared, it was assumed that the Yorktown had already been sunk and this was another previously undamaged carrier, so the IJN pilots assumed they had sunk a second carrier.

This hypothetical result, one Japanese and two American carriers sunk would have been a major victory for the IJN and Midway would likely have fallen to the Japanese troops in transports following the carrier fleet. However, Midway was an atoll and not a naval base. Therefore, the IJN fleet would have had to retire and could never have used Midway as a jumping off point for an eventual invasion of the main Hawaiian Islands.

Midway did have an airfield but flying in Japanese aircraft would have been difficult due to the distances involved plus the troops ashore would have to have been supplied. Although the hypothetical losses suffered above would have been crippling for the Americans and probably would have extended the war by another year or so, Midway could have been fairly easily reconquered and no permanent damage done.

Let's review the overall situation at the beginning of the war and as the war progressed in terms of the most significant element, aircraft carriers. The US began the war with five so-called fleet and three smaller carriers, some of whom were in the Atlantic. The Japanese started with six fleet and four smaller carriers, but these ratios significantly changed as the war progressed. The Americans put seventeen more fleet and six smaller carriers into service whereas the IJN only added two fleet carriers. You can see that the arithmetic just wasn't there for the IJN.

### **Conclusion**

Even though very important, modern total wars are not won by personal bravery or even tactical battlefield brilliance but by a dogged will to see things through to victory plus industrial productive capacity and access to key resources. The Axis did possess the first of these but failed miserably in the other two. Both the Germans and Japanese were dogged by shortages of key resources, especially oil, throughout the war. If somehow the U S could have been kept out of the war (very unlikely) the Germans would have kept the war going for awhile longer but absent a major shipbuilding effort and a huge increase in the size and mission of the Luftwaffe it is very unlikely Hitler would ever have been able to invade and conquer Britain which would have left the island as a thorn in his side when he inevitably sent his forces east to invade the Soviet Union. Not invading would have gone completely against his nature so that counterfactual is off the table.

Hitler's brutal treatment of the Slavic populations he encountered in the Soviet territory under his control made it much easier for Stalin (who was thoroughly hated by many groups in society) to rally the country for a defense of the motherland. He allowed some churches to reopen and enlisted the clergy in his crusade against Nazism. Until the Germans had been completely driven from Soviet soil, there was no chance of a negotiated peace with Hitler. The anger over the sneak attack at Pearl Harbor hardened the attitudes of the Americans and they would never have agreed to negotiations with Japan. If the hardline anti-communist elements in US society would have had their way a separate peace with Germany might have been possible but the news of Hitler's atrocities against the Jews and others which leaked out as the war progressed made this less and less likely. Pat Buchanan a few years ago wrote a book suggesting just this scenario (a separate peace or no war at all) and George Wallace during the 1972 presidential campaign echoed similar sentiments but it was never seriously considered by any elements in the U S government at the time and such a cynical attitude would have poisoned the American international reputation for decades. Another angle in terms of the counterfactuals is that most authors assume that all the Allied & Soviet mistakes are a given but that the Axis would make few, if any errors. In the entire history of military campaigns, there has never been a situation when all the mistakes were made by one side and none by the other.