

Strategic decisions key to World War II victory

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Pulitzer-Prize winning author: Strategic decisions key to World War II victory



David M. Kennedy, Pulitzer-Prize winning author and Stanford University professor, speaks in Bliss Hall Sept. 18 as part of the 9th Annual Col. Ronald A. Roberge Memorial Lecture. Photo by Scott Finger.

Sept. 18, 2008 – A series of strategic decisions led to the Allied Victory in World War II, according to a Pulitzer-Prize winning author who spoke Sept. 18 in Bliss Hall as part of the 9th Annual Col. Ronald A. Roberge Memorial Lecture.

"The keys to victory actually started almost a decade earlier when then President Roosevelt, after seeing the result of World War I, said the United States needed to become the great arsenal of Democracy," said David M. Kennedy, Pulitzer Prize-winning historian. "This meant assembling the equipment, supplies and supply channels necessary to wage a powerful and successful campaign."

A professor at Stanford University since 1967, Kennedy was named the Donald J. McLachlan Professor of History in 1993. The Army War College Foundation sponsored Kennedy's address to USAWC and community members, entitled "A Tale of Three Cities: *How the United States Won World War II*."

One of these crucial moves was the decision to largely incorporate military aircraft as a dominant part of the national military strategy.

"The use of U.S. aircraft, specifically the bombers was made well before we entered World War II,"

said Kennedy. This decision helped lead to the first of the three cities named in the lecture's title.

Rouen, France

On Aug. 17, 1942, a squad of 12, U.S. B-17 bombers took off from England and dropped their payload on Rouen. The lead U.S. pilot, Paul Tibbets, would later attack the city of Hiroshima, piloting the *Enola Gay*, the first airplane to drop an atomic bomb.

Rouen is the historical capital city of Normandy, in northwestern France on the River Seine. Along with much of France in 1942, Rouen was under German occupation.

"The highly successfully mission reinforced the decisions made almost a decade earlier to focus on strategic bombing, to utilize the great advantage of U.S. and British aircraft," said Kennedy. "Strategic bombing had two key benefits. One, it demolished the economic capacity of the target. Two, it terrorized the civilian population and weakened their will to fight."

Washington, D.C.

A set of key decisions made in Washington D.C. in October 1942 reset the timeline and scope for the Allied invasion of Normandy. These decisions were made with economic and logistic factors in mind, noted Kennedy.

"Donald Nelson, the Chairman of the War Production Board, was charged with implementing the 'Victory Program,' which would in part help shift the American economy from a civilian-driven one to a war-time driven one," said Kennedy. The purpose of the board was to regulate the production and allocation of materials and fuel during World War II in the United States. It rationed such things as gasoline, heating oil, metals, rubber, paper and plastics.



"Nelson was one of those that said the plans and schedule laid out in the plan weren't feasible and would in the end be ineffective," said Kennedy. The plan was eventually re-scaled, after visits from the vice president.

Kennedy said that he felt that key strategic decisions led to the Allied



victory in World War II. Photo by Scott Finger.

"Nelson felt that this plan would have put in action plans that could have crippled the U.S. economy, therefore significantly hampering the effort to win the war."

"Some of the key decisions that were made was that the target date for the D-day Invasion was shifted almost a year, to 1944, and the original plan to mobilize 215 divisions was taken down to 95 divisions," said Kennedy.

Stalingrad, Soviet Union

The battles of Stalingrad, now called Volgograd, are considered by many historians to be the turning point of the war.

A major industrial city on the Volga River, Stalingrad was an important objective for Hitler for two primary reasons. Its capture would mean control of a vital transport route between the Caspian Sea and Northern Russia. And, it would secure the left flank of the German armies as they advanced into the oil-rich Caucasus region -- with the strategic goal of cutting off fuel to Stalin's war machine.

The battle of Stalingrad was one of the largest battles in human history, raging for 199 days. When it finally ended in February, 1943, it laid to rest Allied fears that the Soviet Union would either fall or look for a political escape from the war, as it had done in World War I.

"This Soviet victory ratified the viability of the decision made earlier by the American military," said Kennedy. The victory allowed the focus to shift back to the Western Front and helped lead to the success of the Normandy Invasion on June, 6, 1944.

Overall, Kennedy said that World War II had a tremendous effect on the United States.

"Before the war, the economy was very weak and the country tended to be rather isolationist," he said. "But as a result of the war, the U.S. emerged as the largest economic power in the world."

This possibility wasn't unforeseen, according to Kennedy, who referred to a quote by Winston

Churchill, upon hearing of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

"He said that the United States stands at this moment at the summit of the world," said Kennedy. "How prophetic it was. In fact, the U.S. is the only nation to actually see its economy grow during a war. It has led to unprecedented economic prosperity that continues to this day."

Kennedy was the perfect person for the topic, according to a former student.

"No one knows more about how wars have changed America," said Dr. Conrad Crane, director of the Military History Institute. "That's been his life's work."

Joe McDonald, a retired Army Soldier, said he appreciated Kennedy's great job.

"I can remember my father telling me stories about the war and how tough it was," he said. "It's great to hear more about what my father and millions of other Soldiers went through."

Kennedy's books include the 1971 Bancroft prize-winning *Birth Control in America*; 1981 Pulitzer Prize finalist *Over Here: The First World War and American Society*, and *Freedom From Fear*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in history in 2000.

Lecture background

The Col. Ronald A. Roberge Memorial Lecture honors the late Col. Roberge of the USAWC faculty and USMA Class of 1951. The Roberge Lecture is given annually in September as the first lecture of the Military History Institute "Perspectives in Military History Lecture" series. The Army War College Foundation sponsors the Roberge Lecture in support of the student body.

For more information check the AHEC website <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/ahec/index.htm>

Upcoming Perspective lectures

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October 15, 2008 (Wednesday)

Perspectives in Military History Lecture Series

Mitchell Kaidy

WWII Veteran

**Title: "World War II in Europe: A View From
a Foxhole"**

November 13, 2008 (Thursday)

Perspectives in Military History Lecture Series

Joseph L. Galloway

Independent Scholar

**Title: "We Are Soldiers Still: A Journey Back to
the Battlefields of Vietnam"**

December 10, 2008 (Wednesday)

Perspectives in Military History Lecture Series

COL John Dabrowski, Ph.D.

Army Heritage and Education Center

**Title: " U.S. NATO and European Basing,
1949-Present"**

January 21, 2009 (Wednesday)

Perspectives in Military History Lecture Series

Dr. Henry Gole

Independent Scholar

**Title: "General William E. Dupuy: Preparing
the Army for Modern War"**

February 18, 2009 (Wednesday)

Perspectives in Military History Lecture Series

Dr. Peter S. Kindsvatter

Command Historian

U.S. Army Ordnance Center and School

Title: "The G.I. Experience in the Korean War"

March 18, 2009 (Wednesday)

Perspectives in Military History Lecture Series

LT COL John Grenier, Ph.D.

U.S. Air Force

Title: "The First Way of War: American War Making on the Frontier, 1607-1814"

April 22, 2009 (Wednesday)

Perspectives in Military History Lecture Series

Quang X. Pham

Independent Scholar

Title: " A Sense of Duty: My Father, My American Journey"

May 20, 2009 (Wednesday)

Perspectives in Military History Lecture Series

Dr. Robert F. Jefferson

Associate Professor, Xavier University

Title: "Fighting for Hope: African American Troops of the 93rd Infantry Division in World War II and Postwar America"

June 17, 2009 (Wednesday)

Perspectives in Military History Lecture Series

Dr. Reina Pennington

Professor of History

Norwich University

Title: "Wings, Women, and War: Soviet Airwomen in World War II Combat"

July 15, 2009 (Wednesday)

Perspectives in Military History Lecture Series

Barnet Schechter

Independent Scholar

**Title: "The Devil's Own Work: The Civil War
Draft Riots and the Fight to Reconstruct
America"**

U.S. Army War College Archives - News Article - 01 October 2008