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Why did Germany keep fighting on so fiercely against the Allies despite being clear they've already lost by 1944?

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Rafael Cavacchini has written what is probably the most complete explanation as to why the Germans kept fighting even after they recognized that they would lose the war. His explanation is that many fought on because they feared that if they stopped fighting they would be subjected to terrible suffering and probable death.

What lesson can be learned from this example, in terms of how to conduct a war against an enemy? What I take away from this is the absolute necessity of making it clear to the mass of enemy soldiers that they will not be tortured or killed if they surrender. On the other hand, if they do not stop fighting, they will most certainly be killed or maimed when overpowered.

A balance of kind treatment for those who give up and cease resistance, versus harsh treatment if they do not give up, might be the most effective strategy for winning a war.

What kind of treatment might be done? To prevent surrendering soldiers from returning to battle, it would be necessary to place them in prisoner of war camps. However, the most effective policy would be to make sure to give plenty of good food, good medical care, educational opportunities, and kind treatment to prisoners. Then allow them to write letters home to their friends and family about how kind they were being treated, which would reach others who were continuing to serve in the armies, and help to convince them to surrender as well. Mistreatment of prisoners should not be allowed, not only for humanitarian reasons but more importantly as a means of encouraging more enemy troops to give up their fight.

While such a plan would no doubt be opposed by some who wish revenge on a hated enemy, the practical results of a program of kindness for those who surrender would provide a definite strategic advantage for any government that adopted it.

Once an opposing enemy government has stopped the fighting, a different approach might have to be adopted to insure that such a military force would not be able to rise again. That is a very separate question. But to encourage individuals to surrender, a kind policy from the beginning of the fighting is wisest.

I will be interested in others' reactions and perspectives on this approach.

Rafael Cavacchini

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It is hard to put **one single reason** for why did the Germans kept fighting. By 1944 - or perhaps, even *earlier* - the Germans already knew the war as lost. Many argue that the Germans already knew their fate as early as **1940**.

First things first: *the average german soldier couldn't simply surrender*. If a soldier stopped fighting, or deserted, he would have committed "*Wehrkraftzersetzung*" (Fighting power disruption). That would mean *death sentence*. So, just giving up the fight **wasn't an option**, to begin with.

*Field Marshall Ferninand Schörner believed that **a soldier's fear of his commander should be greater than his fear of the enemy**. He executed more soldiers for cowardice than any other German commander. Can you imagine yourself deserting from a battalion led by this guy?*

There is something that is often forgotten when people talk about surrender: **the very disciplined soldier**. You see, a good soldier is **supposed** to stand his ground and leave the worries about the strategic situation to his officers. The German soldier was brave and *extremely* disciplined, no doubts about that, and would **not** typically try to surrender on his own.

Also, at the end of war, most soldiers had experienced their share of victories and defeats. This made they conclude that the military situation would eventually turn again in their favor, as it did in the years before.

Besides, if the Germans surrendered, instead of meticulously organizing a strong defense, there was a **very** good chance that the enemy would show **no mercy**, for them and for the German civilians behind them. The best thing to do was to keep fighting in order to delay the worst outcome. Who knows? Maybe if they fight long enough, they could negotiate a truce, and maybe everybody could go back to a still intact home (and family).

The Germans committed a lot of crimes during the occupation of their neighbouring countries. They were expecting no mercy from their enemies. In fact, they were expecting revenge against themselves and their relatives, and they were absolutely right to do so. It was probably a case of fighting, and die as a soldier, or stop fighting, and they will make sure you'll suffer **a lot** before dying.

Colaboracionists units could only expect the worst. The French SS division *Charlemagne* was amongst the last units to fight for Berlin in 1945. They did it not because they believed their cause, but simply because they could not expect to survive the war. Of course, other units had the same mentality.

Some other units choose to kept fighting in order to allow fellow comrades to evacuate, especially into the western parts of Germany. They kept a corridor open for as long they could, in order to allow civilians and other military personnel to escape into Western Allies zones, where they believed they would be treated fairly, unlike in the Russian side.

Obviously, there is always some fanatics that may still have believed in the Führer and in the Reich till the very end. Some soldiers indeed believed that, somehow, they would turn the tides of war.

Of course, Hitler and his so called **wunderwaffe** helped create the feeling that a miraculous turn was, indeed, possible, specially after the first V weapons were used, in 1944.

You see, there isn't one single answer to why they choose to fight. Most of them probably had their own reasons besides the ones I wrote. In the end, each one of them fought for what, in their heads, was the right thing to do.

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