

WHY DID CHARLES I LOSE THE CIVIL WAR?

Both Parliament and the Royalists fielded armies with little or no military experience. England had enjoyed more than a century of internal peace and in armaments, strategy and tactics, both armies were far behind those used on the continent at the time. Only Fairfax (Parliament) Goring (Royal) and Prince Rupert (Royal) who fought in the Thirty Years War could be classed as professional soldiers.

The Royalist had better and more experienced officer at the beginning of the war and their cavalry under the command of Rupert was far superior. Charles was inexperienced at war, but he quickly learned the trade and war and showed great determination. This was a contrast to the Earl of Essex, the Parliamentarian leader who was a poor general. Parliament was also under the control of "The Committee for the Safety of the Kingdom" headed by men like Pym and Vane, who knew little about soldiering. Charles knew he would be outnumbered, but his plan was to survive the first few months of the war and then hope that his better quality troops and commanders would win the day.

Why then did Charles lose the Civil War?

1. He had to win the war quickly before his money and supplies ran out. His delay and subsequent failure to take London after the Battle of Edgehill in 1642 was crucial to his eventual fall.
2. Charles did not let Prince Rupert conduct the war, as he wanted.
3. The enormous wealth and influence of London and other towns was against him. Parliament always had plenty of money. Traders could borrow money from Dutch bankers, and the towns industries could clothe and arm Parliamentarian soldiers. Certainly some of Charles' supporters own a lot of land, but it could not be turned quickly into cash. In short Parliament controlled the wealth of the nation.
4. Parliament had control of three vital garrisons (Hull, Plymouth and Gloucester) which were in Royalist areas. Charles had no Royal Garrisons in Parliamentarian areas. It is often claimed that these three towns saved Parliament.
5. At the beginning of the war London had a trained militia, whilst the King had none.
6. Parliament controlled the Navy and the main seaports. This made it very difficult for Charles to get supplies from abroad. Also it meant that any port which Charles besieged could be relieved and supplied by the Navy, and vice-versa the Navy could cut off supplies by sea to Charles.
7. Despite attempts by Charles and Henrietta Maria, Charles was unable to get support from abroad, other than a small Irish army.
8. In 1643, the Scots joined the war. They had a good army led by some very professional commanders such as Alexander Leslie and David Leslie.
9. Parliament realised early on, that after defeats they had to change the way their army was run. It rooted out poor commanders. Cromwell and Fairfax were first class generals who, given a free hand, turned the situation around for Parliament. The Ironsides and Lobsters were a match for the Royalist cavalry.
10. The creation of the New Model Army provided Parliament with a professional, properly trained army with whom the Royalists could not compete.
11. Without doubt it was the intervention of the Scots in 1643 and then the introduction of the New Model Army in 1645 that swung matters in the favour of Parliament.