

The Class

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Social Studies—CBA

17 February 2016

## Comparing WWI and WWII

### Introduction

Two massive wars marked the twentieth century: World War I from 1914 to 1918 and World War II from 1939 to 1945. What caused these huge conflicts? How were they fought? Who won each war? And what were the impacts of both wars? While there were some similarities between the two wars, there were also great differences as well.

### Causes

One cause of both wars was Germany wanting land. In WWI, the land situation in Europe was good for all, except Germany. Germany wanted colonies. Similarly, in WWII, Germany became greedy for land, after losing a lot of land in the Treaty of Versailles at the end of WWI. “Between 1921 and 1925 Adolf Hitler developed the belief that Germany required *Lebensraum* (living space) in order to survive” (Noakes). One reason Hitler gained power quickly was because people were desperate after the depression, so they voted for Hitler, who armed the German forces and started claiming land in other countries, for example, Austria and Czechoslovakia. Great Britain and France did not want a war, so they let Hitler take that land. In both wars Germany was pretty greedy for land.

Another cause for both wars was Germany’s militarism. In both world wars, Germany’s leaders were eager for war. Germany’s Kaiser Wilhelm in WWI wanted to go to war for more land. “Wilhelm was an overtly militaristic man, and believed fervently in increasing the strength

of Germanys armed forces” (Duffy). In WWII Hitler and Mussolini were war dogs because they wanted to conquer territory. At the start of WWI, Germany built up a large army. After Germany got crushed in WWI, they rebuilt their army before they launched WWII. In both WWI and WWII, Germany produced an army that was larger than any other in Europe.

In each war there were other major causes. In WWI there were entangling alliances that pulled in more countries. The final cause of WWI was when the Arch-duke Ferdinand was assassinated. The two wars were connected by the fact that the Treaty of Versailles that ended WWI was a major cause of WWII.

#### Why the US Entered Each War

There were not many similarities in the reasons why the US entered both wars. One of the reasons that the US entered WWI was because on May 7, 1915, a German U-boat sank the Lusitania. The US got angry because they wanted freedom of the high seas. After Russia backed out of the war in 1917, all the Allies left fighting were democracies, which the US supported. On January 19, 1917, Germany sent a telegram to Mexico telling them to attack the US, so the US entered WWI. “In 1917 the US declared war on Germany over the submarine issue, though also because of a German offer to Mexico to ally against America” (Stevenson). On the other hand, there was only one big cause for the US entering WWII. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, causing the US to enter WWII. “After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor ... Congress declared war on Japan” (“World War II”).

#### How Each War Was Fought and Won

The difference in technology between WWI and WWII changed the speed of war, how far armies went, and the number of lives lost. In WWI the entire war was fought in Europe, mostly in trenches and with little movement. “At their peak, the trenches built by both sides

extended nearly 400 miles from Nieuport, on the Belgian coast, to the Swiss border” (“The Trenches”). During WWII the war was fought in Europe, Africa, and Asia with quick movement using airplanes and tanks. It was not fought in trenches. Millions of people lost their lives in both wars.

In WWI soldiers only fought soldiers and were not supposed to go near civilians, and especially not supposed to hurt them. However, in WWII Germany did not follow the “soldiers fight soldiers” rule and started to use saturation bombing, killing and harming civilians. Believe it or not, in WWII even when saturation bombing was considered wrong, Germany still bombed Great Britain. “A significant turning point of World War II, the Battle of Britain ended when Germany's Luftwaffe failed to gain air superiority over the Royal Air Force despite months of targeting Britain's air bases, military posts and, ultimately, its civilian population” (Cowley). Later in the war, the US and Great Britain used saturation bombing against Germany and Japan. In both wars, Germany started strong, but lost both times. The Allies were victorious each time.

#### Results of Each War

The Allies won both wars, so the winners were the US, the UK, and France in WWI and the US, the UK, France, Russia, and China in WWII. In both WWI and WWII Germany and its allies lost the war and an international body was set up to stop future wars. After WWI there was the League of Nations, which failed, and after WWII was the UN. Stalin gained the land in Eastern Europe that Germany had stolen. The Yalta Conference separated Germany into East and West Germany and also separated Korea into North and South Korea. “Germany would be divided into four zones of occupation administered by the three major powers and France” (“Yalta Conference”). One long-term effect of WWII was the re-creation of Israel. “On May 14, 1948, David Ben-Gurion, the head of the Jewish Agency, proclaimed the establishment of the

State of Israel” (“Creation of Israel”). At the end of WWI the Treaty of Versailles was designed by the Allies to destroy Germany. In contrast, the Marshall Plan helped rebuild Europe—including West Germany—after WWII.

### Conclusion

World War I at the beginning of the twentieth century cost the lives of millions of soldiers who died in trenches in Europe. In World War II, though, millions of civilians as well as soldiers died as the war raged across Europe, Asia, and Africa. While the Allies won both times, at the end of the first war they tried to destroy Germany so it could never rise again. At the end of the second, the US helped rebuild Europe, including West Germany. Some causes of both wars were similar, but the biggest irony of the two wars was the fact that the treaty that ended the first war helped cause the second.

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