

WWI: A Century of Scrutiny

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World War I officially began on July 28th, 1914, when Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia. It was a war waged between the great powers of Europe, drawing in many more countries. The two opposing forces were the Allied (or Entente) Forces, comprising largely of the French Republic, the British Empire, the Russian Empire, and Italy, and the Central Powers, comprising of Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria. It was thought to be a ‘war to end all wars’ and to be a short one – even ‘over by Christmas’. Obviously these forecasts were wrong, for not only did the war last until November 11th, 1918, total casualties mounting to a staggering thirty seven million for both civilian and military personnel, but the Second World War followed swiftly in its wake a short nineteen years later, bringing even more devastation than its predecessor.

The cause of World War I has been hotly debated since 1914. To many, it seemed a pointless war, especially to those in this post-WWII era, in light of the very obvious causes of and reasons for the Second World War. What many do not realize is that though the immediate trigger for the war may have been the assassination of Austro-Hungarian heir to the throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, Sophie, by Serbian nationalist, Gavrilo Princip, there were many other tensions present in Europe at the time that contributed and lead to the First World War. These factors include nationalism, militarism, imperialism, and the system of alliances.

Nationalism, or the love of one’s country, contributed to tensions in Europe because some governments ruled over many different nationalities. This caused conflict and discord within countries by those wishing to form their own national groupings separate from the country as a whole.

Militarism “controlled the thinking of many European leaders”, says an August 17, 1915 issue of *The Clock*. They believed that the only way to solve problems between nations was through the use of military force. This eventually led to an arms race and a prevailing unhealthy attitude toward war in Europe.

Imperialism created tensions between the great powers as each competed with other imperialist countries to establish more colonies, especially those in Africa and Asia. Disputes often broke out, conflict only averted through compromise that nearly always left one country dissatisfied.

Lastly, the system of alliances present in Europe – the Triple Alliance composed of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy and the Triple Entente composed of Britain, France, and Russia – ensured that World War I would indeed be a ‘world war’; it launched all the great powers of Europe into a global war.

All of these factors can be said to have had a hand in causing World War I, some scholars even claiming they made the war inevitable. This may or may not be the case; but one thing is clear: at the time of World War I, Europe was made ripe for war by nationalism, militarism, imperialism, and the system of alliances.

Today in 2014, a century after the start of this world-changing war, the causes hardly seem relevant. Whatever the reason, the truth is it happened. But we do not need to be haunted by the ghost of a terrible war; we can look forward to a brighter tomorrow, knowing that the

future is in our hands and the past is there to guide us so that we may not make the same mistakes twice.

The Dufferin Historical Museum has many artifacts on display from World War I including various shrapnel helmets, a cavalry uniform, a German breastplate with bullet hole, and several pins, medallions, and war medals.

Commemorative Tea

The Dufferin Historical Museum will be hosting a World War I commemorative tea on Friday, July 25th between 2:00 and 4:00 pm as a memorial of the hundred year anniversary of the start of WWI.