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The Spanish Influenza's Relation to World War I

World War I was directly followed by the Spanish Influenza, which was the primary cause of more death than the loss of life induced by the Great War itself. A common theory depicts World War I as the instigator of the Spanish Influenza, as increased mobilization between countries and continents allowed for the influenza to uncontrollably spread worldwide. It is likely however, that the Spanish Influenza played a significant role in World War I as well, bringing it to an end in 1918. As the mortality rates of both the Allied and Central powers climbed due to the influenza, the continued clash between both sides was rendered impossible, and World War I became a war of attrition. The belligerents of the war were persuaded towards an armistice, as both sides saw the detrimental effects of the influenza as strategically crippling. The Spanish Influenza directly dictated the course of World War I, as the loss of life induced by the lethal disease incapacitated the Allied and Central powers of World War I, bringing the war to an end November 11, 1918.

The Influenza pandemic began in January of 1918, overlapping nine months with World War I. One of the first cases was documented in Haskell County Kansas on March 4th, 1918. By March 11th the disease had spread to New York, and soon after reached Europe due to the revolutionized mobility between continents, a product of World War I. The Great War utilized a nature of military service that maximized close quarter contact. The trench warfare strategy heavily implemented on the Western Front forced troops to fight, live, and survive within cramped and unforgiving spaces. These wartime conditions allowed for the influenza to rapidly

spread between men in uniform and even unsuspecting civilians. The flu eventually devastated both sides, leaving entire fleets crippled with disease, and men on the front lines too sick to fight. The Spanish Influenza took more lives than the lethal wartime weapons held by both forces.

Since the beginning of the war in 1914, where all doctors were dedicated to the lives of troops, the epidemic of the Spanish Influenza turned medical attentions elsewhere. Wartime casualties became a second priority as the flu was ravaging military members and civilians alike. The Journal of the American Medical Association final edition of 1918 stated: "The 1918 has gone: a year momentous as the termination of the most cruel war in the annals of the human race; a year which marked, the end at least for a time, of man's destruction of man; unfortunately a year in which developed a most fatal infectious disease causing the death of hundreds of thousands of human beings. Medical science for four and one-half years devoted itself to putting men on the firing line and keeping them there. Now it must turn with its whole might to combating the greatest enemy of all--infectious disease," (12/28/1918).

World War I may have had two distinctive armies, but the Influenza was an enemy to all. On the Western Front, over 70,000 American troops were hospitalized, and a third did not recover. Around 400,000 German civilians were killed from the Spanish Flu in 1918 alone. The German military was finding it impossible to replace sick and dying soldiers as more prospective soldiers were dying from the influenza than the battlefield. The second wave of the flu was particularly devastating, as young adults were more susceptible than others. Young men in uniform were increasingly affected across territories, making it extremely difficult for warring countries to execute military strategies requiring greater numbers. The war was coming to an end as the Spanish Influenza was continuing to devastate infected countries. The astronomical rates

of death made sustained fighting an impossible feat to achieve for both opposing sides. The growing weakness in the military posture of all involved due to sheer loss of numbers created the wartime environment of possible attrition. Eventually, both Allied and Central powers were open towards an armistice, and on November 11th of 1918, World War I came to a long anticipated end.

I had a little bird,

Its name was Enza.

I opened the window,

And in-flu-enza.

The Spanish Influenza was the bird that flew in to end World War I. Surpassing all death tolls of the Great War, the Spanish Influenza forced the warring powers to end their long fought battle, as their lack of human resources made continued fighting impossible. The sick from both Allied and Central powers spread the disease throughout trenches, countries, and continents. Eventually, the Spanish Influenza killed more than any weapon in the hands of a soldier. Although overlapping for only nine months, the Spanish flu greatly dictated the course of the war. The overwhelming loss of life induced by the Spanish Influenza crippled both belligerents and lead them towards peace agreements, which ended the war November 11th, 1918.