

Throughout history Wars have been given names, often for the length of time they lasted, for the geographical area for which they were fought, or for the succession to a throne—just so that they could be distinguished from the previous, the ‘last war’, and from the future one, bound to come. The one that I aim to describe and how I was affected by it, “Dad what did you do in the last War?”, was the Second World War. Because it extended practically over the whole of Planet Earth, it was rightly named “World War”. Because it was, for the second time, fought between Germany representing Central Europe on the one hand, and the Anglo-Saxon countries on the other, representing the rest of the Planet with the exception of Japan, it deserves the name “Second World War”, or W.W.II in short.

As science and technology had progressed greatly during the 30 year interval which separated W.W.I ending in 1918, from the beginning of W.W.II in 1939, the second world war was far more extensive, it was total. The civilian population was deeply involved in all belligerent countries, often exposed to more danger from the air than the military forces on the ground. The very humane conventions of the Geneva Protocol dealing with civilians and P.o.W. were set aside by several belligerents, and thus W.W.II became a far more cruel war. Its prisoners of war, the P.o.Ws. were cruelly exploited in factories for the production of war materials, if not left simply to die from starvation.

Once W.W.II had started, its totality affected science and technology, pressed into service by both sides. The results soon became obvious. Large fleets of military aircraft were designed, developed and built, and once available, ruthlessly employed. As a countermeasure radar was invented, and finally atomic power found its first devastating use in 1945, as bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. All these scientific and technological inventions were later, after the end of W.W.II, modified and found beneficial use in peace time. The only scientific discovery in war time of immediate humanitarian advantage, was penicillin, first found, isolated and employed in England. Another war time novelty was the widespread use of ‘Operational Research’, later to be called ‘interdisciplinary science’. [See ISR Vol 1, No 1, Editorial “Future Affirmative”]

Penicillin reduced, once it was mass-produced in the United States, the inevitable bacterial infections of war wounds to such an extent that millions of soldiers were able to survive who would otherwise have died, as they did from gangrene in W.W.I. On the other hand the suspension of the Geneva Protocol of the Red Cross led to millions of deaths.