

Famous Portraits Series

Kaiser William II

German Emperor and King of Prussia (1888-1918)

Born: 27 January 1859 Died: 4 June 1918 (Aged 82)



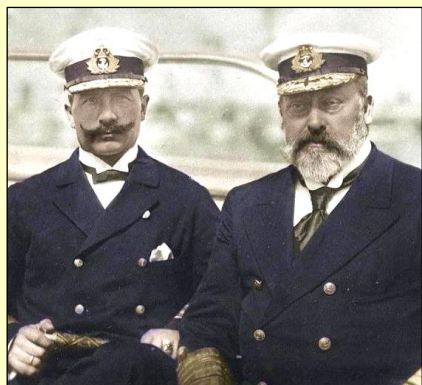
1. William dressed in military uniform in 1871 (aged 12)



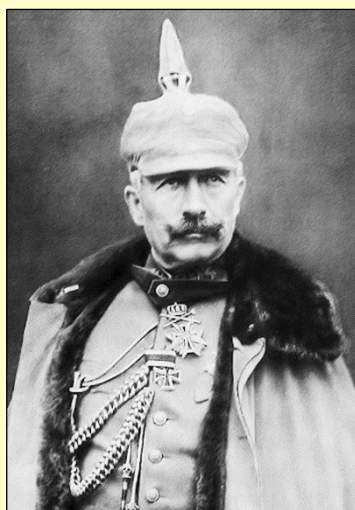
2. William as a student at *Freidrichsgymnasium* in Kassel in 1877 (aged 18)



3. Kaiser William wearing the Prussian officers' uniform in 1890. (aged 31)



4. William with his cousin King Edward VII of Great Britain in naval uniforms in 1902 (aged 43)



5. Kaiser William in military uniform during World War I in 1915 (aged 56)



6. William II in exile at Doorn, the Netherlands. Photographed in 1931 (aged 72)

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Image credits:

1. <https://www.facebook.com/HistoricPhotographs/photos/a.220359594804465/2179181338922271/?type=3>
2. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelm_II#/media/File:Kaiser_Wilhelm_II_Gymnasiast_\(cropped\).png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelm_II#/media/File:Kaiser_Wilhelm_II_Gymnasiast_(cropped).png)
3. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f7/Wilhelm_II_of_Germany.jpg
4. <https://theartsdesk.com/tv/royal-cousins-war-bbc-two>
5. <https://www.alhakam.org/kaiser-wilhelm-ii-the-german-king-who-loved-islam/>
6. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vxb_wOlpk_k

Friederick William Victor Albert of Hohenzollern, or William II was the last German Emperor and King of Prussia. William was the eldest child. His father was Crown Prince Frederick of Prussia. His mother Victoria was the eldest daughter of Queen Victoria of Great Britain. A traumatic breech birth caused him to have a withered left arm which he sought to conceal. In many photos he is shown with a pair of white gloves in his left hand to make the arm seem longer.

In 1881, he married Augusta Victoria, Duchess of Schleswig-Holstein and had seven children. He studied at the Kassel Gymnasium, and later at the University of Bonn. On the death of his grandfather William I in March 1888, his father was crowned Emperor as Frederick I. But Frederick, already diagnosed with throat cancer, died in June of that same year and William succeeded him as Emperor.

Recent analyses of records of his birth in the former Imperial Archives suggested that he may have experienced some brain trauma, possibly leading to some brain damage. Historians are divided on whether this condition may have contributed to his frequently aggressive, tactless, headstrong and bullying approach to problems and people, which was evident in both his personal and political lives.

His rule was noted for his militaristic push to assert German power in Europe and beyond by expanding its colonial possessions. Under the Naval Bills of 1897 and 1900, the German navy was increased to challenge that of Great Britain. His personality and policies alarmed Britain, France, and Russia. In foreign policy he abandoned the careful policies of Chancellor Bismarck whom he had forced to resign in 1890. Bismarck was replaced by a succession of Chancellors who were senior civil servants and not statesmen like Bismarck. By avoiding the emergence of another Bismarck, William hoped to keep all political power under his personal control.

Despite his attitude, it is difficult to say that he planned a Great European war in 1914, although he did little to stop it. He had allied with Austria-Hungary and supported its harsh ultimatum against Serbia in 1914. During the war, he was Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces with the result that he was blamed for Germany's military setbacks.

During the German Revolution of 1918, he hoped to retain the position of King of Prussia. But his abdication was abruptly announced by Chancellor Prince Max von Baden on 9 November 1918, two days before Germany signed the armistice with the Allies which ended the war. The next day, William went into exile to the Netherlands which had remained neutral in the war. The Dutch Queen Wilhelmina refused to hand him to the Allies to be tried as a war criminal.

During the 1930s, William hoped that the Nazis would restore him as Emperor. Despite his great dislike of Hitler, William is said to have expressed some reserved admiration for the Führer who managed to conquer most of Europe, something which his generals had failed to do in the previous war.

After the German conquest of the Netherlands in 1940, William retired completely from public life, while German soldiers guarded the gates of his estate in Doorn. He left orders to be buried in Doorn, and not in Germany. Hitler granted him a down-sized military funeral, but William's wish that no swastikas be displayed during the service was not heeded.

Further reading:

https://kids.kiddle.co/Wilhelm_II_of_Germany

https://academickids.com/encyclopedia/index.php/Wilhelm_II

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vxb_wOlpk_k

Questions

1. How did William II's early years may have affected his later life as Emperor?
2. How was William connected with the British royal family?
3. Mention ONE episode which shows that from the onset, William II was to be a different from his grandfather William I.
4. Mention TWO matters of policy were William II disagreed with Chancellor Bismarck.
5. To what extent can William II be blamed for having caused the First World War?
6. List FOUR facts about William's life after his abdication as Emperor in 1918.
7. What, in your opinion was his greatest failure?
8. Identify TWO adjectives which best describe William's character and personality and give reasons for your answer.