



Media Release

September 20, 2018

World War One caused by English medical incompetence

The cause of World War One was English medical incompetence, new research has claimed.

An English throat specialist's 1887 incorrect diagnosis of German Crown Prince, later Kaiser Frederick III, a liberal and social progressive, led to his premature death and ascendancy to the German throne of his mentally unbalanced, war monger son Kaiser Wilhelm II, according to research by history website historywow.com.

"If Europe's leading throat specialist, Englishman Dr Morell Mackenzie, had not incorrectly diagnosed in May 1887 the throat cancer of the Crown Prince of Germany, later Kaiser Frederick III, he would not have died prematurely, and the history of Germany and Europe for the next 20 to 25 years and beyond would have been vastly different, says Richard Craig, publisher of historywow.com.

"Several eminent German doctors advised in 1887 that a lesion in Crown Prince Frederick's throat was cancerous and should be removed.

"They advised that the surgical risk was low, the Crown Prince afterwards would be hoarse, but would have a voice (1).

"They nevertheless sought the opinion of London-born MacKenzie, Europe's leading throat specialist, who said that the growth was benign, a 'throat infection'(2), and surgery was unnecessary.

"McKenzie's recommendations were followed, and no surgery was undertaken.

"Frederick's ailment was indeed laryngeal cancer, and he reigned as kaiser for only 99 days, until his death in June 1888.

"His son, the new Kaiser Wilhelm II, aged 29, was widely held to be mentally unbalanced, if not mad.(3)

"Unpredictable, impetuous and blatantly militaristic, Wilhelm, the 'All Highest' self-declared chief of German foreign policy (4) set his country on a course over the next 25 years that led to the outbreak in 1914 of World War One.

“Wilhelm would wear up to a dozen military uniforms a day (5), choosing from the hundred and twenty he owned (6). From an early age, he loved nothing more than spending time with the officers of his beloved regiments.

“He gloried in the traditions of the Prussian army and entertained dreams of leading it to new triumphs.

“In short, he was a war monger. The British press, notably Punch magazine, mocked him as the ‘child Kaiser’. But a very dangerous one. (7)

“The kaiser’s close friend, Philip, Prince Eulenburg, described him as ‘mentally unstable’ (8).

“One top German civil servant, Frederick von Holstein, said he was a ‘psychopath.’ (9)

“On becoming Kaiser, Wilhelm set himself on a course of antagonizing other countries and threatening the stability of Europe,” Craig says.

Wilhelm’s father Frederick was a liberal and progressive

“By comparison, Wilhelm’s father Frederick, although serving gallantly as an army officer in two wars, had a hatred of war, and was a liberal, a progressive in the language of today, and socially enlightened. (10)

“As was his English wife, Vicky, the first born of Queen Victoria, who was admired for her intelligence, wisdom and sense of social justice.

“Frederick and Victoria would have made for a very formidable liberal and socially enlightened monarchy at the head of the powerful German empire, the opposite of their son Wilhelm.

“Frederick wanted to introduce substantial changes to the German political structure such as, among other things, a cabinet-style government system, along British lines (11).

“There is compelling evidence to suggest that Kaiser Frederick and Kaiserin Victoria would have not allowed, through the choice of skilled and like-minded ministers, hostility between Germany and the rest of Europe and Britain to continually intensify in the 15 to 25 years from 1888, culminating in the commencement of World War One in 1914.

“A totally different geopolitical atmosphere in Europe would have existed,” Craig says.

“Winston Churchill, who was First Lord of the British Admiralty when World War One started, said three men were to blame for the outbreak of the war. (12)

“The assassin of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand, Serbian national Gavrilo Princip, the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister Count Leopold Berchtold, who wrote the first ultimatum, and the German kaiser who, most importantly, could have stopped the chain reaction of governments bound by military alliances.

“If Kaiser Frederick III had still been alive in 1914, the liberal sovereign would have not allowed the chain reaction of events, following the assassination of the Australian archduke, that caused World War One.

“The tragic shooting of Franz Ferdinand would have been more than likely viewed as just another dispute in the Balkans.

“There was no need for a world war to have broken out.

“The Austrian archduke’s aunt was assassinated in 1898 by an Italian anarchist. This led to neither war between Austria and Italy, nor indeed a world war,” Craig says.

“Kaiser Frederick III became kaiser in 1888 on the death of his 90 year-old father Wilhelm I.

“Kaiser Wilhelm I was king of Prussia from 1861, then German emperor from 1871. This was 27 years as a reigning monarch.

“His grandson, Kaiser Wilhelm II was German emperor for 30 years, until World War One forced his abdication in November 1918. He was to die in exile in Dorn, Holland, in 1941 aged 82.

“On the basis that his father and son both reigned for over a quarter of a century, it is not unreasonable to assume that Kaiser Frederick, had his throat ailment not been incompetently diagnosed by Morell, would have lived another 15 to 25 years, potentially up until the eve of World War One.

Following surgery, Kaiser Frederick 'would be able to command an army corps at a review'

"As his German doctors said when recommending surgery in 1887, the lesion had been discovered early, Frederick was otherwise in good health and, while hoarse, afterwards he 'would be able to command an army corps at a review'.
(13)

"In 1893, at the start of his second term as US president, Grover Cleveland had a malignant lesion of the maxilla removed and a rubber prosthesis installed. The successful and competent performance of this risky upper mouth operation on the president saw him live another 15 years. (14)

"On the death of his father, Wilhelm II became kaiser in 1888 - famously the year of the three Kaisers - at the age of 29.

"He had a shortened left arm and also suffered from an inner ear infection which many speculated had infected his brain. (15)

"He was so afflicted by his imperfect arm that he developed a rigidity in the neck, which was treated by exercise, from apparently turning away from the damaged limb.

"Wilhelm had a love/hate relationship with Britain, of which his grandmother, Victoria, was the venerated Queen. He hated her son, his Uncle Bertie, later England's King Edward VII.

"Wilhelm competed with Britain to have the world's biggest and most powerful navy. Many commentators observed that Germany already had the strongest army in the world (16) and did not also need a world class navy, a direct threat to Britain.

"The German Kaiser created a European zeitgeist, or atmosphere, of tension, peppered with a number of alarming incidents.

England 'ought to be wiped out and the sooner the better'

"He gave an interview, for example, with Britain's Daily Telegraph in 1908 which proved so embarrassing that the Kaiser took to his bed for several days.(17)

“Among other things, the kaiser said the German people, in general, do not care for the British, who are "mad, mad, mad as march hares.".

“In a later published, but not widely circulated, interview in the London Observer, Wilhelm said, incredibly, he ‘loathed’ Britain’s King Edward VII, his uncle. (18)

“He said, “England was rotten and marching to her ruin, and ought to be wiped out.”

“Germany was “ready for war at any moment with her and the sooner it came the better.”

“In 1897 Wilhelm told his minister von Hammerstein that if the “south Germans want to spoil my plans I shall simply declare war on them.”. (19)

“Thus, threatening a civil war in Germany and undoing Bismarck’s work in unifying Germany in 1871.

“In the same year Wilhelm began talking about a coup d’etat, no less, against the Reichstag, the German parliament. He called in the former Chief of the Army General Staff, Waldersee, and told him “I know that you will do the job well if shooting becomes necessary”. (20)

“Wilhelm famously inscribed in 1891 in the Golden Book in Munich town hall *Suprema lex Regis voluntas* - ‘The Royal Will is the Supreme Law’.(21)

“This shocked many in Germany and much of Europe as it was a statement that was more the view of a medieval absolute king and despot, than a late 19th century constitutional monarch, and added to ever growing concern about Wilhelm’s mental instability.

“Wilhelm’s 1896 telegram of congratulations to President Kruger of the South African Republic on successfully suppressing the Jameson Raid by British colonial politician Leander Starr Jameson was a further deliberate provocation to Britain.

“Wilhelm was a maelstrom of hostilities and antagonisms, unbecoming the head of the powerful German state.

“I hate the slavs”, the kaiser told an Austrian officer, before the war. ‘I know it’s a sin to do so. We ought not to hate anyone. But I can’t help hating them.’ (22)

“He described the five feet tall king of Italy, Victor Emmanuel III, as “a dwarf” in front of the king’s entourage. He had a special nickname for the future Tsar of Bulgaria, Prince Ferdinand, which focussed on his big nose, and spread rumours he was a hermaphrodite. (22a)

“Ferdinand von Holstein was for 30 years head of the political department of the German foreign office. He told the British ambassador to Germany Sir Edward Goschen to speak to the kaiser as you would to a ‘fool or a child’. (23)

“Holstein told others Wilhelm was ‘a psychopath’. (24)

“Wilhelm’s closest friend diplomat Philip, Prince Eulenburg, spoke of the kaiser’s ‘mental instability’. He told the kaiser in 1899 there was talk, in high circles, of compelling him to abdicate. (25)

“Others likened him to Bavaria’s Ludwig II, the ‘mad king’, who drowned in 1886 in suspicious circumstances.

“There also is an argument to say that Kaiser Frederick III would have appointed ministers who shared his liberal views and were perhaps more skilled at dealing with the complex European political structure than those, in the case of Wilhelm, who acquiesced easily to his ever-varying wants and demands. (26)

“Frederick would certainly not have become aligned, as Wilhelm did, with Germany’s aggressive, nationalist, hard-right factions who embraced group think that a war in Europe was unavoidable and even necessary. (27)

“If Wilhelm had have become Kaiser, say in 1913, at the age of 54, he would have been more mature, perhaps less militaristic and far less likely to have played the leading role in the cataclysm for Europe that was World War One, out of which stemmed the second disaster some 20 years later of World War Two.

“Even if Kaiser Frederick had only lived another ten to 15 years, that would have been sufficient time to establish a strong liberal theme to German

government policies, which would have arguably spread to its relations with the rest of Europe and Britain.

“One doctor and history researcher has endorsed the idea that the longevity of Frederick’s father and son portended well for Frederick enjoying many more years, if his life had not been cut short by the ‘unnecessary’ involvement of Morell Mackenzie.

“He writes that: ‘It is inconceivable that Germany would have gone down this warpath if the enlightened, reform-minded Kaiser Frederick had lived a normal life span. In 1914 he would have been 82. His father had lived to 90, and Wilhelm II, the cause of it all, died in 1941 at the age of 82.

‘Even if Frederick had not enjoyed quite the same longevity that characterized his family ... World War One would likely have never happened.’
(28)

Could Wilhelm have been declared unfit to rule?

“Another possible outcome is that, if his father had lived, Wilhelm’s increasingly unstable behaviour over his adult years as Crown Prince would have seen him ultimately declared unfit to rule, and his son designated the heir to Kaiser Frederick III,” Craig says.

“There was a precedent for replacing incapacitated Hohenzollerns.

"In 1858 Wilhelm II’s great uncle King Frederick William IV of Prussia had a regent appointed, his brother, after he suffered a stroke which rendered him mentally diminished.

“Historians have traditionally stated that King Frederick William IV of Prussia was replaced as monarch due to insanity, opening up the suggestion that, in the light of Wilhelm II, madness ran in the Hohenzollerns.

“More recent studies have downplayed the overt insanity designation and concluded that a stroke caused his mind to become ‘clouded’. (29)

“In other royal circles, replacing monarchs who were mentally unstable was not uncommon. In 1952 Crown Prince Hussein of Jordan was named successor to his schizophrenic father King Talal (30),” Craig says.

Historywow.com is a concise content, international history website with an audience of some 130,000 history enthusiasts in over 80 countries.

Established in 2012, HistoryWow aims to provide visitors each day with a short, sharp hit of history.

HistoryWow principal researcher Ben Bray has a first-class honours degree in history from Edinburgh University and a masters degree in philosophy majoring in history from Cambridge University.

The HistoryWow name was chosen because history has, indeed, a 'Wow' factor. History is rich in fascinating and inspirational incidents and events.

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