



# **MARS & CLIQ**

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## Once upon a time before the Great War

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### The plot

The year is 1904. Anglo-German relations are tense, but King Edward VII may be able to patch things up with the ever-volatile Kaiser Wilhelm when he visits Germany. However, a junior German Guards officer has just written a language-training book with incendiary remarks about the British which will certainly cause a conflagration if published. King Edward decides he must raise this with the Kaiser...

### Main characters

*Oberleutnant* [Lieutenant] **Wilhelm von Jecklin**, 3rd Guard Grenadier Regiment, studying at the Staff College [*Kriegsakademie*].

**Carrie née Wille**, his South African wife, originally from Graaff-Reinet in Cape Colony.

Lieutenant Colonel **Henry Shute**, Coldstream Guards, commandant and martial law administrator of Graaff-Reinet 1901-1902, and now Principal Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for War.

Lieutenant Colonel Count **Edward Gleichen**, Grenadier Guards, British Military Attaché in Berlin.

**Sir Frank Lascelles**, British ambassador in Berlin.

Secretary of State for War **H.O. Arnold-Forster** and the British Cabinet.

Count **Bernhard von Bülow**, German Chancellor.

King Emperor **Edward VII**, uncle of...

Kaiser of the German Empire and King of Prussia **Wilhelm II**.

### The story

My interest in Wilhelm von Jecklin comes from a project I'm working on about German views of the British army from 1898 to 1918. As part of that, I look at how the Germans studied the British and what their language skills were like. On a research trip to the military archive in Munich, I came across a little book called *The Military Interpreter. Sammlung von englischen Übungsstücken mit Lösungen zur Vorbereitung auf die militärische Dolmetscherprüfung* [Collection of English practice pieces with solutions for preparing for the military interpreter examination], by *Oberleutnant* von Jecklin.

I wondered how such a junior officer would have the language skills to produce the book. Googling around, I came across his marriage certificate to a South African woman, Caroline 'Carrie' Wille, and even though from her name I assumed she was an Afrikaner, I thought that was probably how Wilhelm von Jecklin developed his English. Googling further, I found Matthew Seligmann's book about British military and naval attachés, *Spies in Uniform*, from which I first realised that what



**figure 1:** Wilhelm von Jecklin in uniform (with permission from the Wille family)



**figure 2:** Wilhelm von Jecklin and Carrie Wille (with permission from the Wille family)

seemed a simple language-training book had in fact caused a high-level Anglo-German row.<sup>1</sup> I followed up his references as well as contacting the Wille family, and that's when things got really interesting. Now read on...

When *The Military Interpreter* was published in 1904, Wilhelm von Jecklin was a 29 year-old lieutenant in the prestigious 3rd Guard Grenadier Regiment. He had some 11 years' service in the army under his belt; and he was a student at the German army Staff College, so he had a promising future.

By then he had been married to Carrie Wille for four years. She was born in Graaff-Reinet in the British Cape Colony; although the marriage certificate gives her religion as evangelical, she was in fact half-Jewish on her mother's side. Her father's parents were originally from Hessen in Germany but had emigrated to South Africa in 1843 as missionaries.<sup>2</sup> From Cape Town, they had made their way north to Graaff-Reinet, where their son Carl – Carrie's father – stayed and became a prosperous merchant. The rest of the family pushed on into the independent Orange Free State.

Carl Wille sold his business in 1895 and took his family to Europe. The two sons went to school and later university in Britain; the three daughters to schools in Dresden and Geneva. In Germany, the family apparently lived in the Berlin suburb of Charlottenburg for a while. This was where Jecklin's regiment was stationed, so that's one way he and Carrie may have met. Another is that the Jecklin family originally came from Switzerland, and the two could have met there. Either way, they married in Charlottenburg in 1900.

Wilhelm von Jecklin would have needed permission to marry, so Carrie's foreign nationality, her father's profession as a merchant and her mother's Jewish family origins were clearly no impediment even given the prevailing class-consciousness and antisemitism in a Guards regiment.

Carrie's parents and younger sisters returned to Graaff-Reinet in 1900, by which time the Boer War was raging. While their two sons were studying in Britain, other members of the family in the Orange Free State – Carrie's uncles and cousins – were fighting for the Boers. At least eleven were captured by the British; two of them were in a prisoner of war camp in Simonstown, but nine were transported to Ceylon, where one died. Putting all this together, it seems fair to assume that the family in Graaff-Reinet – which was under martial law at the time – would have had split sympathies, given that they had sons in Britain and many other relatives with the Boers.

Jecklin signed off the foreword to his book *The Military Interpreter* in March 1904, and it was certainly published by June.<sup>3</sup> The practice pieces in it are official documents and letters, with the German translation on the left and the English original on the right. Some of the documents are part of a fictional running scenario in which Germany invades and defeats Britain. These include:

- British use of dum-dum bullets contrary to the Geneva Convention.

<sup>1</sup> Matthew S. Seligmann, *Spies in Uniform: British Military and Naval Intelligence on the Eve of the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 55.

<sup>2</sup> The story of the Wille family in this and the next three paragraphs comes from an unpublished manuscript, 'Wille Family Tree – Introduction', written by family member Roland Kingwill in 1981.

<sup>3</sup> This edition of *The Military Interpreter* from The National Archives (TNA), FO800/11, f. 326-378.

- How British soldiers who wish to surrender are to identify themselves, and regulations about British prisoners of war.
- A besieged British fortress firing on a German officer carrying a flag of truce.
- Conclusion of an armistice between Britain and Germany, signed by the plenipotentiaries of Kaiser Wilhelm II and King Edward VII; as part of this, the British are to surrender various forts.
- Replacement of the British authorities in the occupied counties of W. and K. by German authorities; German police and gendarmerie will supplement the British.
- The use of German currency in Britain, and the exchange rate between German and British currencies.
- A forced contribution of £500,000 to be paid by the county of W.
- Orders for prominent local British figures to report to Victoria Station to be used as hostages for protection against attacks on trains.

Documents outside this scenario include Martial Law Notice No. 3, signed by H. Shute, Major and Commandant, Graaff-Reinet and dated 4 January 1901 (i.e. during the Boer War). This is a genuine document based on a leaflet or poster issued in Graaff-Reinet by Shute on that date; although the third notice, it set out the basic martial law regulations.<sup>4</sup> We can assume that the Wille family in Graaff-Reinet had passed it to Jecklin via Carrie. Were they intending to damage Britain's reputation? They might have been. On arrival as commandant, Shute had been ordered to take 'severe measures' and this he had done.<sup>5</sup> His strict implementation of martial law had led to frequent complaints from local citizens as well as several unsuccessful attempts by the government of Cape Colony to remove him.<sup>6</sup> So he was not necessarily popular in the Wille household.

At some point before June 1904, the book's publishers sent a copy to Lieutenant Colonel Count Edward Gleichen, British Military Attaché in Berlin.<sup>7</sup> He realised the potential damage which the anti-British messages in the book would cause if they became public and immediately reported to his ambassador, Sir Frank Lascelles.

Events now developed in parallel in Britain and Germany. Ambassador Lascelles believed that publication of the book would 'raise a storm of indignation' in Britain. He therefore approached the head of the German foreign office, Oswald Freiherr von Richthofen, presumably with the aim of getting the book suppressed. Richthofen in turn took the issue up with *Generalleutnant* [Major General] Karl Litzmann, director of the Staff College and Jecklin's ultimate military superior as a student there. We don't know how Litzmann responded, but he certainly did not offer any apology.

<sup>4</sup> Major H.G.D. Shute Boer War diary, Appendix IV, National Army Museum, 2019-08-5-40-1. A handwritten note, presumably by Shute, says 'This notice was reproduced in a German mil handbook called The Military Interpreter, 1904.'

<sup>5</sup> Shute diary, 4 January 1901.

<sup>6</sup> Amelia Esther Clegg, 'The British Army, the Regimental Officer, and the South African War: Command, Leadership, and Professionalism in the Coldstream Guards Middle Echelon (1899-1902)', unpublished Ph.D thesis, Birkbeck College, 2023, 165-168 and 298.

<sup>7</sup> This account draws largely on British correspondence and records in TNA, FO 800/11; I have been unable to find any German sources.

By now, Gleichen had sent a copy of Jecklin's book to his military boss in London, Director of Military Operations Major General James Grierson, adding that the matter was being dealt with by Lascelles and Richthofen. Grierson passed Gleichen's correspondence to the Secretary of State for War, H.O. Arnold-Forster, either directly or via his Principal Private Secretary, Lieutenant Colonel Henry Shute – by coincidence, the very man who, as a Major and commandant of the Graaff-Reinet District, had issued the Martial Law Notice included in Jecklin's book.

Despite the assurances that the matter was being handled in Berlin, Arnold-Forster clearly felt the need to inform the Cabinet. We don't know what happened there, but in due course the issue – and a copy of the book – reached King Edward VII.

Meanwhile, Shute wrote to Gleichen complaining about what he called 'a scandalous book' and declining to allow his name to be associated with it. Although his job as Principal Private Secretary to Arnold-Forster is not mentioned in the correspondence, he was obviously too important to be ignored. Local Cape Colony politicians may have disapproved of his actions during the Boer War, but he had found favour with senior British military and political leaders including Field Marshal Lord Roberts and Lord Milner; he also had good connections with the local Reuters correspondent and Rudyard Kipling; and he had worked with Arnold-Forster, then an MP making a visit to South Africa. When Arnold-Forster became Secretary of State three years later, he asked Roberts to arrange Shute's posting as his Principal Private Secretary.<sup>8</sup>

So on 20 June Gleichen wrote a shirty letter to Jecklin asking him in no uncertain terms to withdraw Shute's name from the revised edition which was being prepared. Gleichen added:

*... as an expression of my own opinion, ... I do not understand how an officer of a so-called friendly nation can permit himself to write a book which is, in its form, an indirect incentive to war on England, & to publish such grossly calumnious insults on British officers & men as have appeared in your book...*

A few days after this, King Edward arrived on the royal yacht in the German port of Kiel on a much-anticipated visit to the Kaiser as part of the sailing week there. He wanted to stress the sporting and family nature of the visit, but of course there was a major diplomatic aspect too. Anglo-German relations had experienced an extremely bumpy ride since at least 1896, particularly during the Boer War. Earlier in 1904, the British and French had signed the Entente Cordiale, potentially signalling a profound change in international relations and to Germany's own status as a world power. At the beginning of June – just over two weeks before King Edward's visit – Kaiser Wilhelm threatened Britain with war if it did not agree to German demands on its rights in Egypt, which it believed were affected by the Entente.<sup>9</sup>

Wilhelm in particular had high expectations of his uncle's visit and insisted on micro-managing their meetings. Before the first one, he was 'walking restlessly around the deck [of his own yacht], and could scarcely bear to wait for the time to go by'. The visit passed with exchanges

<sup>8</sup> Clegg, 'The British Army, the Regimental Officer, and the South African War', 162 and 294-298.

<sup>9</sup> John C.G. Röhl, *Wilhelm II: Into the Abyss of War and Exile 1900-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 258.

of dinners on board the two royal yachts, watching the racing and other festivities, including a visit by King Edward to Hamburg. All appeared to go well, and the visit ended ‘with the usual exchange of telegrams containing extravagant expressions of thanks and assurances of friendly relations between the two nations’.<sup>10</sup>

But in fact all had not gone well. Gleichen, who was present, takes up the story of what happened on the last day:

*So when all the festivities at Kiel, which lasted for a week, were over and matters had been smoothed over, and both sides were feeling more friendly, King Edward pulled [Wilhelm’s] book out of his pocket and said laughingly to the Emperor: “This is a nice sort of thing that your officers publish – and you pretend that your country wants to be so friendly with England. What humbugs you must be!” All this said in the most friendly chaff. But the Emperor was not at all in the mood for chaff; he took it very seriously indeed and was furious – with me! Though he never spoke to me about it afterwards personally, he said I had done a most outrageous and unfriendly thing in sending the book home to the King, and said that I ought to have come to him about it at once, and he would have stopped it; and here he was, having just made friends with England, and I had spoilt it all again.<sup>11</sup>*

This was serious enough that Lascelles wrote next day to the Imperial Chancellor, Bernhard Graf von Bülow, who was also formally in charge of foreign affairs:<sup>12</sup>

*You are no doubt aware that the Emperor spoke to General Grierson and me very earnestly last night [29 June, the day of the final meeting between the King and Kaiser] about Count Gleichen’s action in bringing Herr von Jecklin’s book “The Military Interpreter” to the notice of the King. If I understood the Emperor correctly, His Majesty was under the impression that Count Gleichen had deliberately attempted to sow dissension between our two countries at a moment when His Majesty himself was doing all in his power to place the relations between them on a more satisfactory footing. I have reported in this sense to the King, who desires me to ask you to explain to the Emperor that His Majesty appears to have received an inaccurate impression of Count Gleichen’s actions.*

Lascelles then explained the sequence of events after Gleichen received the book from the publishers, as related above. He continued:

*So far from this being any desire to sow dissension between our two countries, it was with the earnest desire of preventing the possible publication of a book which could not have failed to raise a storm of indignation in England that His Majesty [King Edward] considered it advisable to speak to the Emperor personally on the subject. His Majesty considers that in bringing the book to my notice and in reporting that the matter was being dealt with by Baron von Richthofen and myself, Count Gleichen acted with perfect propriety and He therefore hopes that the Emperor*

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 258-262.

<sup>11</sup> Major-General Lord Edward Gleichen, *A Guardsman’s Memories: A Book of Recollections* (William Blackwood & Sons Ltd: Edinburgh and London, 1932), 264.

<sup>12</sup> Lascelles to Bülow, 30 June 1904, TNA, FO 800/11, f. 379-385.

*will exonerate him from the blame which His Majesty [the Kaiser] imputes to him, and will deign to grant him an audience for the purpose of offering any further explanations which His Majesty may desire to receive.*

*The King lays great stress upon the Emperor's affording Count Gleichen an opportunity of offering explanations, as he is not only Military Attaché but is related to H.M. [King Edward] through marriage, and the King having appointed him in the hopes of his being a persona grata to H.M. [the Kaiser] he would therefore deeply deplore if this untoward [word missing] should in any way damage his position in the eyes of the Emperor.*

*You are aware how very much pleased and gratified the King has been by the very warm and cordial reception He has met with on the part of the Emperor, His Ministers, Household, Army, Navy and populace during his visit to Kiel which will never be effaced from his memory. He would therefore bitterly deplore any incident, however small, which might mar the effect of his visit on which I may say the eyes of the world have been brought to bear.*

Next day, Gleichen called on Bülow to explain matters further. Bülow was very friendly, greatly deplored 'the stupidity and mischievousness' of the book, 'which he could not condemn too highly'; he also made very disobliging remarks about Jecklin. He himself believed that so far from sowing dissension between Britain and Germany as the Kaiser alleged, Gleichen had done his utmost in the opposite direction by trying to get the book suppressed. He supposed there must have been some mischief-making by those on board the German royal yacht to put these mistaken ideas into the Kaiser's head. Who did Gleichen suspect? Gleichen refused to name anyone, but in fact believed that the Kaiser's chief military aide, *Generalleutnant* Dietrich Graf von Hülsen-Haeseler, had something to do with it. Bülow said he would write to the Kaiser, forwarding Lascelles' letter and a statement by Gleichen.<sup>13</sup>

On 14 July, Major Friedrich von Trotha, a battalion commander in Jecklin's regiment, visited Gleichen. Trotha began by saying that Jecklin felt insulted by certain expressions in Gleichen's letter; Gleichen should withdraw it and apologise. Gleichen refused and showed him the book, which he had not previously seen. Trotha then admitted that the contents were 'pretty bad' and Jecklin had shown 'great want of foresight'. However, he had already been punished by being thrown out of the Guards, he had lost a lot of money over the book and he had often expressed his deep regret about it, including at an 'honour council'. Gleichen said that as Jecklin had publicly regretted what he had published, he was happy to withdraw his letter and in fact was sorry to have written it.

This in turn prompted Jecklin to write to Lascelles on 19 July:

*Your Excellency*

*I beg to declare again, now that Count Gleichen has withdrawn the letter he wrote to me and regretted writing it, that I never had the intention of insulting the British people and army through the content of my book. Furthermore, I am happy to repeat that I regret having published the book in its offensive form.*

<sup>13</sup> Gleichen to Lascelles, 2 July 1904, TNA, FO 800/11, f. 387-388.

*I have the honour to be, Your Excellency, your humble  
von Jecklin, Oberleutnant in 12th Grenadier Regiment*

As the signature block shows, Jecklin had indeed been transferred out of his prestigious Guards regiment. However, Grenadier regiments were the senior infantry units of the army after the Guards, so 12th Grenadiers was a more than respectable regiment to be transferred to. Also, it was stationed in Frankfurt on the Oder, a reasonable-sized town only 50 miles from Berlin and with a direct train connection, so not the back of beyond.

In addition, Jecklin was allowed to complete the Staff College course and was then given a probationary secondment to the general staff. In the end, though, he did not get a permanent transfer to the staff. This Staff College–probationary secondment–permanent transfer or not to the general staff is all very normal, so his career did not necessarily suffer any other damage than the transfer out of the Guards. He even got to publish a second edition of his book in 1904, with the same content but omitting Shute's name and all but a few minor references to Britain.<sup>14</sup>

In fact, given that he had enraged both the Kaiser and the Chancellor – and no doubt other senior officers and officials – he probably got off lightly!

### **What happened to them later**

**Wilhelm von Jecklin.** On the outbreak of war, he was a *Hauptmann* [Captain] commanding a machine gun company and was seriously wounded in late August 1914, losing his left eye. Having recovered, he continued to serve, at first in a variety of staff jobs but from early 1916 to the end of the war commanding a battalion; he was promoted Major in 1917 and awarded a high Prussian decoration. After the war, he became a right-wing local politician in Berlin. He died in 1937.

**Carrie Wille.** Despite her Jewish ancestry, Carrie remained in Germany after Wilhelm died until early 1945, perhaps protected by his military and political connections. As the Third Reich crumbled, she made a harrowing escape to Switzerland and from there returned to Graaff-Reinet in South Africa. She died in 1952.

**Henry Shute.** After leaving his job with Arnold-Forster, he served as Assistant Adjutant-General, Home District from 1905 to 1908 and was promoted Colonel. He died suddenly in 1909.

**Count Edward Gleichen.** His position in Berlin became untenable after further spats with the Kaiser, who had never really forgiven him for his actions over Jecklin, and he was transferred to be military attaché in Washington. After serving in an intelligence job in the War Office, he commanded 15th Brigade in 5th Division from 1911 to 1915 and 37th Division from April 1915 to October 1916. In 1917-1918 he served as a senior official in the Department of Information, which was responsible for British propaganda. He reached the rank of Major General, retired in 1919 and died in 1937.

<sup>14</sup> My copy of the second edition is from Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv/Abteilung IV Kriegsarchiv, München, Library Abschnitt VI B/5 Nr. 1269.

**Sir Frank Lascelles.** He left post as ambassador in Berlin in 1908. As a senior member of the Anglo-German Friendship Society, he strove for good relations between the two nations right up to the outbreak of war. He died in 1920.

**Oswald Freiherr von Richthofen.** During the Kiel visit, King Edward conferred on Richthofen the Grand Cross of the Victorian Order (GCVO), which was in his personal gift. Richthofen was still head of the German foreign office when he died in early 1906.

**James Grierson.** He commanded 1st Division from 1906-1910, was promoted Lieutenant General in 1910, knighted in 1911, and commanded Eastern Command from 1912 to August 1914. On the outbreak of war, he was appointed commander of II Corps. He died of a heart attack in France on 17 August 1914.

**H.O. Arnold-Forster.** He left office as Secretary of State for War when the Conservative Party lost the 1905 election. He remained an MP till his death in 1909.

**Bernhard Graf von Bülow.** He retired as Chancellor, more or less forced out of office, in July 1909. From then on, he lived in Italy, where he was Ambassador from late 1914 till Italy's declaration of war in mid-1915. Some politicians considered him for Chancellor again in 1917, but his candidacy failed against the Kaiser's opposition. He died in Rome in 1929.

And last but certainly not least:

**Dietrich Graf von Hülsen-Haeseler.** Promoted *General der Infanterie* [Lieutenant General] in 1906, he died at a formal dinner two years later in unusual circumstances:<sup>15</sup>

*Suddenly Count Hülsen-Haeseler appeared in ballet skirts – not for the first time – and began to dance to the music. Everybody found it most entertaining, for the Count danced beautifully, and it is an unusual experience to see a Chief of the Military Cabinet capering about in the costume of a lady of the ballet.*

Immediately after this, he died from his exertions.

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<sup>15</sup> Count Robert Zedlitz-Trützschler, *Twelve Years at the Imperial German Court* (London: Nisbet & Co. Ltd, 1924), 252-253.