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**Somes Island Internment Camp**  
**for**  
**Enemy Aliens**  
**During the First World War:**  
**An Historical Enquiry**

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A thesis presented in  
partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
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Originally this thesis was to include more personalised information on internees. However, as the previously hidden story unfolded on an unanticipated scale, and in order to remain even remotely in touch with its designated word length, I was forced to set most of this aside for a proposed enlarged project on the camp. However, I still wish to acknowledge the historically invaluable information they supplied. They are: Ann Sheeran, Levin (daughter of Elizabeth Hargreaves, formerly Nickel), Wilma Phillips, Eastbourne (daughter of Harry Rather), Erika Grundmann, Cortes Island, British Columbia, Canada (who is researching the much travelled George Dibbern), my second cousin Gordon Burr, Foxton (grandson of Ludwig Eder), Glen Middendorf, Queenstown (granddaughter-in-law of Anton Middendorf), Bob Milverton, Palmerston North (step-son of Frank Kellerman), Laurie Rands, Silverdale, Auckland (great

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**"New Zealand has taken part in this world's war according to her strength and ability. New Zealand's part in this war is but a small section of the whole, but it is New Zealand history.**

**They who love best their land, love truth best.**

**When the desire for truth has given place to unreasoning passion, dispassionate historians will find the records of**

**Somes Island Internment Camp for civilian internees a black page in the book of this Dominion's History.**

**Your Honour, we do not ask for privileges or for favours.**

**We request that we receive the treatment and consideration that we (are) due from members of one civilised nation to another and such as are consistent with the claims of humanity.**

**Signed, Karl Joosten, Spokesman."**

*From a statement addressed to Justice Chapman during the 1918 Royal Commission of Inquiry into the treatment of "enemy aliens" interned on Somes Island. 28 May 1918.*

*(Somes Island Statements, MS Papers 2071, WTU)*

## Abstract

New Zealand's history undoubtedly contains many unusual situations that await reassessment, and it is only natural that some of these situations will show the country, or its government, or its people in a less than pleasant light. This country prides itself on its fair-mindedness, concern for others and a wide range of positive attributes, yet the First World War prejudice that targeted New Zealand's ethnic minorities of "enemy origin" - with its epicenter based on Somes Island - places considerable pressure on those beliefs. New Zealand was, of course, not alone in its response to the effects of that war nor to the planned anti-German propaganda campaign which occurred at that time.

Matiu/Somes Island, located on Wellington's doorstep, is largely ignored on a daily basis by thousands of people. Some aspects of its history seem relatively well-known, for example, its long career as quarantine station for both humans and livestock. Even the internment camp on the island in World War Two is increasingly well-known and well-documented. On the other hand, New Zealand's first prisoner of war internment camp for so-called "enemy aliens" remained a mystery until now. Beneath this largely forgotten camp, however, there lies an enormous archival iceberg. The New Zealand Government solved a potential local and international problem in 1919, by shipping most of it back to Europe. At the same time it also shipped out of sight a significant aspect of the country's social history.

## WE PRISONERS OF WAR

Since every country calls its men  
 Beneath the flags and colours,  
 At least those men who freely can  
 Now earn their fame through valours,  
 It is for us a little bad,  
 Not that we care for fame,  
 But that we are prisoners without crime  
 Is going to make us tame.

Before the war we worked the land  
 In Navvies' and Bushmans' graces,  
 We worked on stations, gave a hand  
 In flax and sawmill places,  
 We helped in England's Merchant Fleet  
 As Firemen and Sailors,  
 Made clothes, put shoes on many feet  
 As Bootmakers and Tailors.

We made us friends as Germans do  
 Amongst this Country's people,  
 And many girls we loved to woo  
 Then our race is not feeble,  
 But since the war we have perhaps  
 Lost many friends in number,  
 Oh! may this wartime soon elapse  
 And soon succumb in slumber.

By PAUL ARNOLD  
 Interned Auckland 10 August 1914  
 Repatriated per *Willochra* 14 May 1919  
*(Somes Island Statements, MS Papers 2071, WTU)*  
*(Also AAAB 482/32e, Arnold, Paul, NA)*

## Introduction

Despite its apparent easy accessibility, Wellington Harbour's largest island, now officially named Matiu/Somes Island, has long been out of reach of the general public. In 1995 its management was transferred from the Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries to the Department of Conservation (DOC). As a result, DOC is now working to protect and restore the island's historic and natural resources. Although readily accessed by the public via the harbour ferry, the island's reserve status is based on its scientific and historic value rather than its potential as a tourist attraction. For example, tuatara have recently been released on the island.

A Maori settlement in pre-European times, Matiu/Somes served from the 1870s as Wellington's quarantine facility. Not only did it accommodate newly imported livestock, but it also housed potentially contagious human immigrants when the need arose. As a result, for many decades casual visits to the island were strictly forbidden. During both World Wars, the fortress-like island served a more sinister purpose. In addition to standard military uses, such as providing an ideal site for anti-aircraft guns during the Second World War, the old quarantine barracks and the island's handy yet isolated location, saw it transformed into the country's main facility for the internment of civilian prisoners of war.

The Second World War internment camp is increasingly well documented. Researchers experience little difficulty obtaining information on the experiences of inmates. For a start, some internees and guards are still available to be interviewed<sup>1</sup>. Publications discussing this camp are also increasingly available. For example, James N. Bade's *Out of the Shadow of War: The German connection with New Zealand in the Twentieth Century* (1998) covers the period, including a glimpse at the camp. Paul Elenio's book *Alla Fine Del Mondo: To The Ends of The Earth* (1995) includes a chapter on the 38 Italians interned on Somes during this time<sup>2</sup>. Maurice Gee's 1998 novel, *Live Bodies*, based on the memoirs and internee files of prisoners, describes the life of an Austrian Jew held there<sup>3</sup>. The play *Eulogy*, performed in Wellington in 1998, provided another look at conditions in the camp during this period, including clashes involving ideology (Nazism) and ethnicity (Germans, Jews and Samoans)<sup>4</sup>. Other books recording the island's Second

World War experiences include *Scars on the Heart: Two Centuries of New Zealand at War* (1996). Even so, this book's single reference to the earlier camp is not even indexed<sup>5</sup>.

By comparison, the minimal coverage of the First World War Internment Camp in existing publications, infers that it was a mere footnote in history. The aforementioned imbalance in *Scars on the Heart* is one example. Bade's *Out of the Shadow of War* again briefly covers the camp while outlining the period. Similarly, Simon Johnson's 1975 thesis, *The Home Front: Aspects of Civilian Patriotism in New Zealand during the First World War* provides a glimpse at the camp in its chapter on "enemy aliens"<sup>6</sup>. My own 1996 BA(Hons.) Research Exercise, *German-ating the Seeds of Anger, The Great War's Impact on Germans in Manawatu and Rangitikei*, provides an introduction to the topic through the personal files of the small number of internees from the districts covered. The camp also appears, albeit briefly, in at least one novel, Alexander Evelyn's obscure 1944 work *Thord*<sup>7</sup>. However, once again a minority ethnic group became the first documented in any detail, with Andrew D. Trlin's study entitled, *Now Respected, Once Despised, Yugoslavs in New Zealand*, of the experiences of the few Dalmatian internees<sup>8</sup>.

Usually, though, the First World War camp appears only in vague terms in generalised references to Somes. These include books on Somes itself, or on Wellington Harbour (Port Nicholson) and its waterfront suburbs. Typically, photos of happy internees stare back from pages and the vague published details are quickly abandoned in favour of the exciting von Luckner story. Consequently, the rich and highly troubled history of the 1914-1918 camp soon succumbs to the story of a man who never set foot on the island.

The 1918 Chapman Royal Commission of Inquiry<sup>9</sup> examined claims of ill-treatment on Somes and is now a valuable source of information on the camp. Unfortunately, being written at a sensitive time and with a legalistic agenda meant that its many explicit truths can seem unclear in its conclusion. It is, therefore, easy to underestimate problems in the camp. One example of this, subsequently quoted in a 1996 DOC report<sup>10</sup>, is David McGill's *The Pioneers of Port Nicholson*, published in 1984. McGill claimed that Justice Chapman, who conducted the Royal Commission, dismissed all charges of ill-treatment

to internees by the guards, except one where the guard concerned had since been dismissed<sup>11</sup>.

This thesis seeks, therefore, to rediscover the 1914-1918 Internment Camp and also to reassess the generally accepted arguments relating to it. Sources included newspapers of the day, especially the *Evening Post* for the entire period. Interestingly, this newspaper also proved to have been the only significant source of regular “off-island” information available to the internees. Other major sources through which the internee “sub-culture” itself speaks, include a series of 1916 petitions to the American Consul General<sup>12</sup> and also the evidence presented during Chapman’s Inquiry<sup>13</sup>. This material, combined with camp records (no master collection of key records has yet revealed itself) and the personal records of many of the hundreds of participants, both internees and guards, reveals that Chapman’s strictly “legal” methodology obliged him to overlook or understate the value of a significant amount of this evidence. He did, however, generally accept that many things were not as they should be as regards the administration of the camp.

In hindsight, and without Chapman’s limitations, evidence he regarded as exaggerated is often plausible, despite the times and the personal circumstances of some participants. Quite simply, these men risked criticism, ridicule and possibly retribution if they lied, as, with the exception of the Chapman statements, the authorities religiously filed duplicate copies of their accusations, and also collected and filed information from their inward and outward personal correspondence. In addition, two internees risked their lives swimming to the mainland in an unsuccessful attempt to seek help. Realisation that New Zealand conveniently “repatriated” most of these men to their homelands in 1919 (unlike World War Two) maintains the disquieting aura surrounding the camp. Just as “dead men” can no longer talk, neither - effectively - can their descendants or their memoirs when these sources of information now reside in Europe.

This thesis aims, then, to rediscover and investigate the obvious complexities of a largely ignored chapter in New Zealand’s history. A “black page” in fact, as key participant Karl Joosten claimed in 1918<sup>14</sup>. The 1914-1918 internment camp eventually held almost

double the population of the 1939-1945 camp. Therefore it seems unusual that so little is known of it in comparison with the later camp. This thesis also aims to place the Somes experience into an international context.

<sup>1</sup> e.g. Nicholas Boyack, 'Guarding enemy aliens on Somes Island was a farce, soldier recalls,' in *Hutt News* 13/2/1996, pp. 33,36. Steve Braunias, 'A voyage around my father,' *The Listener*, 9/9/1995, pp. 32-36, and 'Gregory Riethmaier', in James N. Bade (ed.) *Out of the Shadow of War: The German Connection with New Zealand in the Twentieth Century* (Auckland, 1998), pp. 218-223

<sup>2</sup> Paul Elenio, *Alla Fine Del Mondo: To The Ends of the Earth* (Wellington, 1995) pp. 57-70.

<sup>3</sup> Maurice Gee, *Live Bodies* (Auckland, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> *Evening Post* (EP) 2/3/1998 'Strange stories of island internees.' The author also attended this play.

<sup>5</sup> Chris Pugsley, et. al., *Scars on the Heart: Two Centuries of New Zealand at War*. (Auckland, 1996). pp. 100, 214-215.

<sup>6</sup> Simon Johnson, *The Home Front: Aspects of Civilian Patriotism in New Zealand during the First World War* (M.A. Thesis, Massey University, 1975)

<sup>7</sup> Alexander Evelyn, *Thord* (Wellington, 1944). pp. 277-280.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew D. Trlin, *Now Respected: Once Despised, Yugoslavs in New Zealand* (Palmerston North, 1979). pp. 99-133.

<sup>9</sup> *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, (AJHR) 1919, Section H-33.

<sup>10</sup> Tony Walton, 'Somes Island Archaeological Site Survey' (Department of Conservation, Wellington, 1996). p. 3., citing McGill, 1986[sic]: 180-182.

<sup>11</sup> David McGill, *The Pioneers of Port Nicholson* (Wellington, 1984). p. 182.

<sup>12</sup> Somes Island Statements, MS-2071 [Note: These appear to be the originals held by the internees] (WTU). Also AAAB 449/52a, Complaints by POWs to American and Swiss Consuls (NA)

<sup>13</sup> Somes Island Official Papers 1917-1918, Micro MS-18 (WTU)

<sup>14</sup> K. Joosten to Justice Chapman, 28/5/1918. Somes Island Statements, MS Papers 2071 (WTU)

## Origins of “At Risk” Populations

Those residing in enemy territory during wartime live with the risk of persecution and reprisal. Those perceived as more dangerous than others risk internment and even death. During World War One, the British Empire classified as “enemy aliens” any subject of the Central Powers, namely Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey and Bulgaria. However, even subjects of neutral or Allied countries risked internment if signs of sympathy with the Central Powers came to the attention of the authorities.

Large-scale migration out of nineteenth century Europe meant that by 1914 receiving countries such as New Zealand contained many citizens with genealogical ties to enemy countries. Passing years, and passing generations, may have greatly reduced their personal affinity with ancestral homelands. Still, wartime paranoia regarded even vague links to enemy countries with intense suspicion. Especially vulnerable were men still bound to their homeland’s military reserve, as their orders required that they return home for military service in times of war. In addition, older immigrants sometimes fought for their homelands prior to migrating. Internment was the logical way, therefore, for a host country to deal with trained enemy soldiers living within its borders and also apparent enemy sympathisers, who might otherwise harm the host country.

Germans comprised the largest “enemy alien” population in New Zealand and also, as a consequence, in its internment camps. The German-born population peaked in 1886, with that year’s Census finding 5,007 people, or 3,255 males and 1,752 females<sup>1</sup>. The early cessation of larger-scale organised German migration to New Zealand (German migration to New Zealand cannot be classified as “large scale”), meant that by 1916 the median age for German immigrants was 52 years. In contrast, the median age for New Zealand’s overall population was a mere 25 years<sup>2</sup>.

Furthermore, many of these elderly Germans left their former homeland soon after the establishment in 1871 of the German Empire. Given the sequence of wars that placed Prussia, and the formidable Count Otto von Bismarck, at the head of this empire, it is not

surprising that many family traditions state that forebears severed their ties to their homeland (whichever one it was) to escape a future war. It is wrong, therefore, to assume that these people as a whole identified with Bismarck, Prussia or even with the German Empire. Many "Germans", for example Poles, and Danes from Schleswig-Holstein, identified with the subsumed state in which their ancestral roots lay.

In addition to the gold seekers of the 1850s and 1860s, and others who came individually, such as seamen and businessmen, German families migrated to New Zealand during two main periods. The 1840s saw a comparatively small migration period, while many more arrived in the 1870s. Other would-be settlers arrived in batches throughout the intervening period. Germans in fact became New Zealand's second largest immigrant group after the British<sup>3</sup>.

The earliest organised German migration, arranged by the New Zealand Company, resulted in the arrival at Nelson on 14 June 1843 of the *St. Pauli*, carrying 135 men, women and children<sup>4</sup>. Originally planned as founders of a German colony on the Chatham Islands, objections by the British Colonial Office resulted in the New Zealand Company's Hamburg Agent persuading investors and prospective colonists to go to Nelson instead. Unfortunately, by this time the New Zealand Company was faltering and the Nelson colony was also struggling.

Initially many of these people settled in the Lower Moutere Valley, but the site proved swampy and flood-prone. As a result, some moved to Nelson and others to Waimea Valley where some shipmates had settled successfully. Others moved to Adelaide, only to return in the 1870s. Despite the difficulties, the *Skiold* arrived at Nelson in 1844 with 141 passengers, some of whom also relocated to Adelaide<sup>5</sup>.

German migration back to the Moutere Valley began in 1850, albeit to a better location. Eight more ships brought Germans to this district during the 1850s and 1860s. They named their Upper Moutere village Sarau, after a valley in Northern Germany. However, given the First World War xenophobia, Sarau School tactfully became Upper Moutere School in 1917<sup>6</sup>.

Sir Julius Vogel, Colonial Treasurer and later Premier, introduced the Immigration and Public Works Scheme that operated in New Zealand during the 1870s. This scheme was responsible for bringing German settlers into the country on a far greater scale. Between 1870, when the New Zealand Government adopted the scheme, and 1876, when it abruptly ceased assisting non-British migrants, some 2,939 assisted German migrants arrived in New Zealand. The second largest non-British group were 1,930 Danes, with a combined total of 3,281 people assisted from the three Scandinavian countries<sup>7</sup>.

The 1871 Census found 2,416 German-born people spread fairly evenly through five of the eleven provincial districts, namely Auckland (423), Nelson (427), Canterbury (456), Westland (451) and Otago (448). Figures for the remainder were Taranaki (12), Wellington (74), Hawkes Bay (22), Marlborough (56), Southland which amalgamated with Otago around this time (43) and the Chatham Islands (4)<sup>8</sup>. By 1878 the picture was somewhat different. Figures were Auckland (373), Taranaki (238), Wellington (963), Hawkes Bay (222), Marlborough (62), Nelson (412), Westland (621), Canterbury (851), Otago (902) and the Chatham Islands (5)<sup>9</sup>.

Links between the German communities in New Zealand and South Australia increased in the 1860s. Some families who had emigrated to South Australia in the 1830s moved to the Marton area after their land deteriorated<sup>10</sup>. They probably comprised most of Wellington Province's aforementioned 74 people in 1871. Many more Germans settled in the Manawatu-Rangitikei district during the 1870s. Especially significant were settlements at Marton, Halcombe and Rongotea, while others were Stoney Creek near Palmerston North, and later Kimbolton, which drew families from the earlier settlements<sup>11</sup>. Other German communities developed in Taranaki, Wanganui, Southern Hawkes Bay, Wairarapa, and parts of Canterbury, Otago and Westland, as well as the main centers<sup>12</sup>.

The Marton, Halcombe and Rongotea Lutheran churches cemented ties between those communities. Lutheranism also helped transcend boundaries between the Scandinavian and German communities. Unfortunately, as it was also deemed symbolic of Germanism

to some, arsonists destroyed the Halcombe church, and probably the Rongotea parsonage (there being no other obvious cause), in July 1917<sup>13</sup>. Although the Marton Lutherans thought their church would be next, it survives today<sup>14</sup>. Rongotea's church, however, succumbed to lingering anti-Germanism in 1922, shortly after its relocation and conversion to a Lutheran school<sup>15</sup>. Similar attitudes also resulted in the Government-ordered destruction in August 1918 of Christchurch Lutheran Church's three high-quality German-made bells. Popular belief that they were once French cannons, proved incorrect when a furnace transformed them back into ordinary bell metal<sup>16</sup>.

This particular high point in anti-Germanism coincided with the trans-Tasman passenger steamer *Wimmera* sinking on 26 June 1918 with the loss of 26 lives. The ship had struck a German mine off Cape Maria Van Diemen<sup>17</sup>. This tragedy coincided with and further enflamed widespread calls for the mass internment of all enemy aliens. Sir James Allen, Minister of Defence and Acting Prime Minister for much of this period, advised, however, that: "retaliation (mass internment), owing to the numbers concerned, would be to our disadvantage"<sup>18</sup>. Angry accusations in circulation - inspired by large casualty lists arriving from France - claimed that people of enemy alien descent who could not or would not join the armed forces, were taking advantage of the labour shortage and demanding high wages<sup>19</sup>. The Gisborne Borough Council even initiated a campaign by the country's Borough and County Councils, demanding either mass internment or conscription of these men for national service at soldiers' pay rates<sup>20</sup>. It was because of this campaign that George Dibbern of Dannevirke, found himself on *Somes* for the first time. After repatriation to Germany in 1919, he returned to New Zealand in time to be reinterned there for the next war<sup>21</sup>.

Despite persecution the earlier immigrants undoubtedly experienced, the most recent arrivals fared the worst, especially undischarged army reservists. Seamen from visiting ships and recent settlers who were unnaturalised proved particularly vulnerable. Many remained interned as no-one - or no-one with sufficient social standing or later with a £100 bond<sup>22</sup> - knew or cared enough about them to vouch for their on-going good behaviour. Finally came established and often naturalised settlers, who over time lost everything due to this trick of fate. Ironically, scarcity of jobs for "enemy aliens" saw

some men the Government chose not to intern, later beg for internment when this seemed the only way they could feed and accommodate themselves or their families. Although seriously effected in other ways, perhaps as few as two women were interned. These were an outspoken Dane, Dr. Helmar von Danneville of the Lahmann Health Home, Miramar<sup>23</sup>, who was briefly on *Somes*, and the French-born wife of a Samoan German, who probably chose to stay on *Motuihi*.

Prior to the Austro-Prussian War of 1866, Austria was the dominant force amongst the German states. Won by Prussia, the war resulted in Austria's expulsion from the German Confederation. This in turn led to the foundation in 1867 of the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary. Restricted to foreign affairs and times of war, the arrangement was a security compromise between what otherwise were two separately run empires.

Austrian migration to New Zealand before World War One also occurred in two stages. The first involved the arrival of some families in the 1860s and 1870s. Far more significant to the First World War "enemy alien" situation though was the arrival of hundreds of single men from the 1890s.

In 1863, eighty-three men, women and children from Bohemia (then part of Austria and now part of Czechoslovakia) arrived on the *War Spirit* to settle at Puhoi, near Auckland. By 1876, three more contingents had settled there<sup>24</sup>, while others settled in the Manawatu-Rangitikei district with their German and Scandinavian shipmates<sup>25</sup>. Austrian immigration largely declined after the New Zealand Government stopped assisting Northern European immigrants in 1876.

The 1878 Census reveals that Auckland province had the largest concentration of Austrians, with 184 found. Other provinces revealed: Taranaki (12), Wellington (45), Hawkes Bay (25), Marlborough (2), Nelson (24 males), Westland (54 males), Canterbury (99), Otago (38 males) with none in the Chatham Islands<sup>26</sup>. By 1914, most were elderly and naturalised, yet hostile eyes still turned toward Puhoi until comments in Parliament resulted in the town and its people being declared loyal<sup>27</sup>.

From the 1890s, many more Austrians arrived. Unlike their predecessors, these were the Croat-speaking Dalmatians (or Yugoslavs, later Yugoslavs and now Croatians), who flooded in seeking their fortunes in the Kauri gumfields<sup>28</sup>. Consisting mostly of young, unmarried men, Trlin found that of 1,380 Dalmatians listed as New Zealand residents in 1916, only 417 (30.2%) were married. Usually the wives stayed in Austria. However, when they did come, lack of funds meant they often arrived long after their husbands, or that the prospective husband had returned to Austria to find a wife<sup>29</sup>. As most Dalmatians aimed to earn money in New Zealand and return home, few attempted to establish themselves here. Given this factor and their ethnic difference, they also attracted the envy and condemnation of other gum diggers. New Zealand, these latter people considered, gained nothing from Dalmatians<sup>30</sup>.

This long-standing resentment, combined with their new-found "enemy alien" status, caused Dalmatians to be regarded even more cautiously when war erupted. Yet evidence clearly suggested that many Dalmatians detested the leadership in Austria-Hungary. For instance, three days after Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia (and thus four days before the Great War officially began), about 100 demonstrators attempted to burn a copy of the Austrian Field Marshal's flag outside the Austrian Consul's Auckland office. The police intervened, though, leaving the demonstrators to make their point by trampling on the flag and tearing it to shreds. The demonstrators then walked along Queen Street, singing and cheering in support of Serbia<sup>31</sup>.

Not surprisingly, differences between Austrian families of the 1860s and 1870s, and Dalmatian men of the post-1890s, meant that by 1916 their median age differed somewhat to that of Germans. Whereas the Census found a median age of 52 years for the Germans and 25 years for the general population, the 2,365 Austro-Hungarians' median age was only 31 years. Furthermore, the 2,115 males, including many Dalmatians, had a median age of 30 years, while the 250 females, including few Dalmatians, had a median age of 41 years<sup>32</sup>.

Of the 34 Austrians on Somes and Motuihi when the Alien Register originated in late 1917, thirteen described themselves as Dalmatian. Others had Dalmatian surnames<sup>33</sup>.

When the *Willochra* left New Zealand to repatriate the prisoners of war in 1919, eighty extra Dalmatians - who had been on parole - seized the chance for a free trip home<sup>34</sup>. Unfortunately they reckoned without the post-war shipping problems and a four month stay in Holdsworth Concentration Camp, at Liverpool, Sydney, awaiting a ship to take them home<sup>35</sup>.

Until the 1921 Census, which found 32 males and 12 females, New Zealand's censuses did not list Hungarian immigrants separately<sup>36</sup>. Luciano Lenaz, an Auckland gardener aged 51, was the only Hungarian internee in late 1917<sup>37</sup>. Lenaz, whose family lived in Australia, and Adolf Szenes, a parolee, were the only Hungarians repatriated in 1919<sup>38</sup>.

Turkish and Bulgarian migration to New Zealand was also minimal. Although Turks rated a mention in most pre-war censuses, they, along with the Bulgarians, also spent time classified amongst those born in "Other European Countries". The 1906 Census found a pre-war peak of thirty-six (26 males and 10 females), while in April 1916, twenty (13 males and 7 females) claimed birth in the European portion of Turkey. A further seven males and one female claimed birth in "Turkey in Asia", a category that excluded 392 Syrians from Turkish-held Palestine, Transjordan, Lebanon and of course Syria<sup>39</sup>.

Great Britain declared war on the Ottoman Empire on 5 November 1914, yet the only Turk interned in New Zealand, Joseph Meshoullam (or Msholm) was not New Zealand-based. In fact the married, 21-year-old just happened to be in Alexandria, Egypt, in December 1914 when the troopship *Orari* delivered its share of New Zealand's Main Expeditionary Force<sup>40</sup>. When its captain found himself short of crew for the return voyage, he hired Meshoullam.

Meshoullam's ruse failed before the *Orari* reached Wellington in late January 1915. Based on the crew's evidence, the police arrested Meshoullam aboard the ship in Auckland on 9 February 1915. Although he claimed Spanish ancestry, his Turkish passport - which he attempted to destroy - revealed that he was the Constantinople-born son of a Jew. While joining the crew of a homeward-bound "enemy" troopship casts

doubt on Meshoullam's common sense, his file indicates that he was well travelled, understood Spanish and some English, and that he was rather cunning<sup>41</sup>.

In December 1914, a second Turkish seaman, Carlo Aleason, aged 55, arrived in Auckland from New York on the *Westward Ho*. He took ill soon after and spent some time in hospital. On 25 May 1915 he arrived at an Auckland police station stating that he was penniless, an enemy subject and a prohibited immigrant. Duly arrested for internment, by 1 June he had been delivered to Wellington where complaints of chest pains caused him to be delivered to Wellington Hospital instead of Somes. He remained there until his death on 14 June, three days after his "official release" from internment. Medical advisors and Major Matheson, Commandant of the Somes Island Internment Camp, both recommended against interning men this ill<sup>42</sup>. In contrast, Aleason probably reasoned that at least internment meant food, board and medical care.

New Zealand's Bulgarian population attracted little attention prior to Britain's declaration of war on its homeland on 15 October 1915. However, on 17 October, the Commissioner of Police, John Cullen, instructed the police to arrest any Bulgarian reservists and to list all other Bulgarians whether naturalised or not<sup>43</sup>. Few were found. Prior to 1916, only the 1886 Census even mentioned Bulgarians, with two males turning up. The 1916 Census found three males and three females<sup>44</sup>. These included Stanko Rangeloff (25) and Costa Stoykoff (32), unmarried labourers from Kaupakonui (near Manaia) and Whangarei respectively, who were interned in late November 1915<sup>45</sup>.

Rangeloff's three years in New Zealand followed another year in Canada. Similarly, Stoykoff's five years in New Zealand followed two more in Australia. Rangeloff, a Bulgarian reservist, was interned because supposedly he could not find work, despite a supportive employer at time of arrest<sup>46</sup>. Meanwhile Stoykoff, also described as a good worker, harboured very bitter feelings toward North Auckland's Austrian (Dalmatian) population. Theoretically, his internment prevented him from acting on these feelings.

On 12 May 1916, Australia's Minister of the Navy (Mr J.A. Jensen) announced a reciprocal agreement between Australia and Bulgaria that meant Bulgarians aged under

17 or over 55 years of age would not be interned. In addition, Bulgarians of any age who could provide for themselves would also remain free<sup>47</sup>. Although associated documents concerning New Zealand's apparent involvement in this agreement have not been traced, on the same date New Zealand's Governor sought information on Bulgarian internees from Prime Minister Massey. Massey advised that the Bulgarian internees would be released when suitable work was found for them. However, fear of hostility from the general public, saw both men prefer internment unless their former employers would re-employ them. They stayed interned and were repatriated in 1919<sup>48</sup>.

The Australian Census for 1911 found a mere 322 Turks and 54 Bulgarians, consisting of 254 and 49 males respectively<sup>49</sup>. Despite near-invisibility in numerical terms, they made a definite impact. Near Broken Hill on New Years Day, 1915, a Turkish ice-cream vendor, assisted by a somewhat gullible Hindu, hoisted a Turkish flag on his ice-cream cart and started shooting at a passing train carrying 1,200 picnickers. Before the two men (both described as "hemp smokers") were killed themselves, four picnickers lay dead with another seven wounded. In response, the enraged townsfolk burnt down the town's German Club and attempted to attack the local camel camp, despite the inhabitants being Indians and, therefore, British subjects<sup>50</sup>. In May 1916, following the aforementioned agreement with Bulgaria, a military escort took twenty-two Bulgarians from Holdsworthy Concentration Camp, Sydney, to Broken Hill to work in the mines. The resulting uproar saw Broken Hill's notoriously volatile unionists threatening to interfere with recruiting for the military unless the Bulgarians were removed<sup>51</sup>.

A few other nationalities were represented on *Somes*, due to some belief on the part of the authorities that the individuals concerned sympathised with the Central Powers. Perhaps most noteworthy were four "disloyal" Russians from the Baltic States (some because they supported Germany's invasion of their Russian-occupied homelands)<sup>52</sup> and two "Germans" who later were reclassified as Poles. All remained in New Zealand, the Russians because the Bolsheviks captured Odessa just before the *Willochra* sailed, thus blocking their route home<sup>53</sup>, while the re-establishment of Poland in November 1918 led to the reinvention of that country and its subjects as "friendly"<sup>54</sup>.

Many countries, including New Zealand, operated military training schemes prior to (and long after) World War One. The reservist system operating in Germany in 1914 traced to Napoleon's defeat of Prussia in 1806. The resulting reorganisation of its military saw Prussia forced by Napoleon to restrict its military force to a standing army of only 42,000 men. In response, Prussian military reforms in 1814 and 1815 resulted in the introduction of conscription and lengthy service in the Prussian Army. Even so, soldiers spent much of this service in the reserves while leading their normal civilian lives. Thus, a very large army of trained reservists stood behind Prussia's small "official" army<sup>55</sup>.

By 1914, all German men between 17 and 45 years, "unless a member of the ruling classes or certain princely families," were liable for military service. Active service involved two or three years in the standing army and four or five in the reserves. Thereafter men transferred to the *Landwehr*, or militia, where they spent five years in the 1st Battalion. At age 38, they transferred to the *Landwehr's* 2nd Battalion. From there until aged 45 years they served in the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the *Landsturm*, a level called to defend Germany in extraordinary circumstances only. Thus Germany's peacetime standing army of some 800,000 men, could if necessary mobilise to over three million<sup>56</sup>.

Given the extent of nineteenth century German migration to New Zealand, some identifiable "German" settlements and the leading role Germany played in the war, it is not surprising that German expatriates suffered the greatest home-front backlash in New Zealand during World War One. While youthful Dalmatians might theoretically have been a significant threat, their strong protests against their homeland's leadership suggested otherwise. In fact, dislike of them by the general public was more likely to be for economic reasons. On Somes, however, and for reasons of allegiance, there was certainly little love lost between the Germans and the Dalmatians. Despite obvious negativity toward Hungarians, Turks and Bulgarians, their scarcity meant they seldom featured in New Zealand's home-front racism.

<sup>1</sup> Val Burr, *German-ating the Seeds of Anger: The Great War's impact on Germans in Manawatu and Rangitikei*, (BA[Hons] History Research Exercise, Massey University, 1996), p. 40, Table 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Census of New Zealand, 1916, 'Birthplaces'*, pp. 4-8.

<sup>3</sup> James N. Bade (ed.), *The German Connection: New Zealand and German-Speaking Europe in the Nineteenth Century* (Auckland, 1993). p. 37

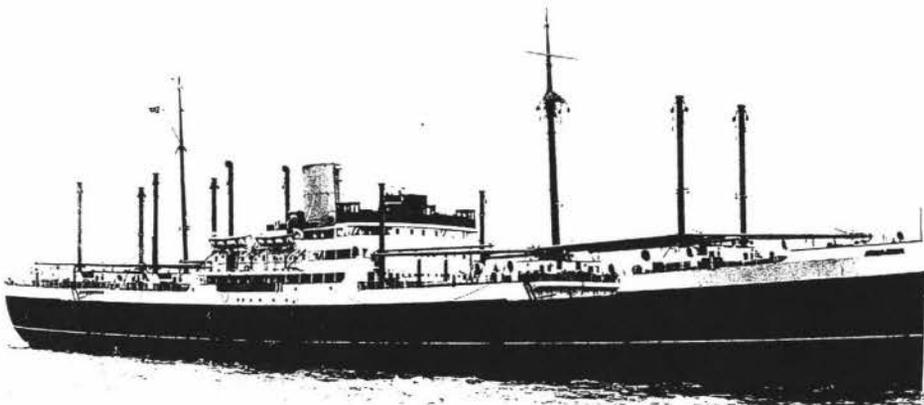
- <sup>4</sup> Jenny Briars & Jenny Leith, *The Road to Sarau: From Germany to Upper Moutere* (Upper Moutere, 1993). p. 141.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p 141-2.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117
- <sup>7</sup> *AJHR* 1877 D-5, p. 3.
- <sup>8</sup> *Census of N.Z.* 1871, Table 11.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 1878, 'Birthplaces of the People', p. 229.
- <sup>10</sup> Burr (1996), p. 4
- <sup>11</sup> See Val A. Burr, *Mosquitoes & Sawdust: a history of Scandinavian Settlement in early Palmerston North & Surrounding Districts* (Palmerston North, 1995) and Burr (1996), both of which cover this topic - from Scandinavian and a German perspective respectively.
- <sup>12</sup> I.H. Burnley, 'German Immigration and Settlement in New Zealand 1842-1914', in *New Zealand Geographer*, Vol. 29-30, 1973-74, pp. 50-56.
- <sup>13</sup> *Evening Standard* (ES) 2/7/1917 4(7), *Feilding Star* (FS) 3/7/1917 4(2), 16/7/1917 3(3), *Manawatu Daily Times* (MDT) 3/7/1917 5(5).
- <sup>14</sup> Lutheran Church of N.Z. Annual Convention, Minutes 1907-1920, p. 150. MS Papers 2200 CR 1/1 (WTU)
- <sup>15</sup> FS 7/2/1922 3(2), 9/2/1922 4(3)
- <sup>16</sup> *The Press* 17/7/1918 4(5), 1/8/1918 6(2-3), 2/8/1918 9(3), 7/8/1918 6(3) & 6(8)
- <sup>17</sup> G.W.N. Ingram, *New Zealand Shipwrecks 1795-1970* (Wellington, 1972). pp. 331-2. The mine had been laid by the German raider *Wolf* in 1917. Just as the *Lusitania* caused a tremendous increase in anti-German hatred throughout the world, so too did the sinking of the *Wimmera* cause a similar increase within Australasia. The ship had been carrying 76 passengers and 75 crew.
- <sup>18</sup> EP 7/8/1918 6(9)
- <sup>19</sup> e.g. MDT 9/7/1918 6(3)
- <sup>20</sup> e.g. EP 16/7/1918 6(8) [Petone Borough Council], 24/7/1918 11(1) [Karori Borough Council], 26/7/1918 3(3) [Wellington City Council], 27/7/1918 7(8) [Nelson City Council]. MDT 17/7/1918 5(7) [Palmerston North Borough Council]
- <sup>21</sup> *Dannevirke Evening News* 5/6/1918 4(4), FS 6/6/1918 2(4). Also Personal correspondence from Erika Grundmann, Cortes Island, British Columbia, Canada, 4/11/1998, and Erika Grundmann to Dannevirke Gallery of History, 30/9/1998 (copy held by author).
- <sup>22</sup> e.g. Col. Gibbon to Mr Scholes, 23/7/1917. AAAB 482/44f, Kellerman, F. Also Margaret Mumme to Minister of Defence, 18/8/1916, J. Allen to Mrs M. Mumme, 24/8/1916, Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 6/9/1916, AAAB 482/24o, Mumme, C. (NA)
- <sup>23</sup> EP 5/6/1917 3(3), 16/7/1917 6(7) Dr. Hjelmar von Danneville, whose "crimes" evidently included her "eccentricities of attire" such as wearing her hair short and usually wearing clothing of a masculine-style, such as hat, coat, vest, collar and boots, along with a skirt. After about five weeks, the fifty-four-year-old unregistered (in New Zealand anyway) medical assistant was rescued by her friends with the help of a good behaviour bond, but not before she had reportedly suffered a severe nervous breakdown. Her personal file, existing now only as "AAAB 482/..... POW 455" (National Archives) has at some early been purged.
- <sup>24</sup> Bade, (1993) pp. 65-71.
- <sup>25</sup> N.Z. Dept. of Internal Affairs: *Register of Aliens*, 1917. See the boroughs and counties of Manawatu-Rangitikei. Of note are the Fafieta, Kroupa and Krivan families which appear as Prussians on the *Terpsichore*'s passenger list. Other references include Burr (1995) p. 64 (Fafieta), p. 36 (Krivan); *The Tribune* 15/9/1996 'Settlers at Final Rest' (Krivan); *Register of Aliens* p 487 (Kroupa).
- <sup>26</sup> *Census of N.Z.* 1878, 'Birthplaces of the People', p. 229
- <sup>27</sup> Bade, (1993). p. 71.
- <sup>28</sup> Trlin, p. 60
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99. Chapter 5 entitled 'Enemy Aliens', covers the Dalmatian experience in New Zealand during World War One.
- <sup>32</sup> *Census of N.Z.*, 1916, 'Birthplaces', pp. 4-9
- <sup>33</sup> *Register of Aliens*, 1917, pp. 681-691.
- <sup>34</sup> Prisoners of War for Transshipment Australia (On Parole), also Embarkation Roll, H.M. Transport *Willochra*, AD 1 59/156/2 (NA)

- <sup>35</sup> T. Trumble, Defence Dept., Commonwealth of Australia, to The Secretary, Department of Defence, Wellington, 5 November 1919. This letter contains a list of all prisoners who sailed on the *Frankfurt* on 18 September 1919. AAAB 482/18a Rangeloff, S. (NA)
- <sup>36</sup> *Census of N.Z.*, 1921 - Birthplaces, p. 13.
- <sup>37</sup> *Register of Aliens*, p. 687.
- <sup>38</sup> Prisoners of War for Transshipment Australia, AD 1 59/156/2 (NA)
- <sup>39</sup> *Census of N.Z.*, 1916 - Birthplaces, p. 3. Also, David McGill, *The Other New Zealanders* (Wellington, 1982). pp. 107-112.
- <sup>40</sup> New Zealand Expeditionary Force (Europe) 1914, *War Diary*, (Wellington, 1915). p. 24-6, 29-32
- <sup>41</sup> AAAB 482/13e Michalon (sic), J. Especially Police Report of Det-Sgt. J. McIlveney 2/2/1915; and A.K. Mackenzie (Acting Spanish Vice-Consul) to Minister of Defence, 22/3/1915 (NA).
- <sup>42</sup> AAAB 482/33I, Aleason, C. Note: The entire file relates to his two-week internment. Capt. P.W. Skelley to the Prisoners of War Information Bureau, 5/9/1916, in AAAB 482/44f Kellerman, F. (NA)
- <sup>43</sup> AAAB 478/3d Bulgarians (NA).
- <sup>44</sup> Police report 1/11/1915 by Det-Sgt. J.N. Hollis, Auckland Detective Office, lists three Bulgarian men known to be living in that district, Costa Stoykoff (Warkworth), George Christoff, fisherman (Auckland) and D. Petroff, gardener (Dargaville). AAAB 482/18d Stoykoff, C. (NA). Also Police Report 6/11/1915 by Sen. Sgt. A. McNeely, Hawera Police Station, states that Stanko Rangeloff was the only Bulgarian in the District so therefore could not do much harm. AAAB 482/18a (NA).
- <sup>45</sup> *Register of Aliens*, 1917, entries 689/4 and 690/12.
- <sup>46</sup> AAAB 482/18a (NA).
- <sup>47</sup> EP 19/5/1916 7(4) This report, dated 12/5/1917, provides the only details of this agreement I have located, although presumably it was between Britain and Bulgaria. However, a reference (the origin of which is at present uncertain) to Dispatch 197, dated 21 March 1916, from the Secretary of State for the Colonies to New Zealand's Governor, appears to refer to the same agreement.
- <sup>48</sup> Liverpool (Governor) to Prime Minister, N.Z., 12/5/1916. W.F. Massey to the Governor 26/5/1916; Col. C.M. Gibbon to Commandant, Somes Island Internment Camp, 29/5/1916; Major Matheson to Adjutant-General 31/5/1916. AAAB 482/18a (NA)
- <sup>49</sup> *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1911 - Birthplaces*, pp. 109, 113, 116.
- <sup>50</sup> EP 2/1/1915, 2(7-8); 4/1/1915, 8(6).
- <sup>51</sup> EP 19/5/1916 7(4), 20/5/1916 5(4), 23/5/1916 7(6).
- <sup>52</sup> e.g. AAAB 482/25d Nester, P., AAAB 482/67e Muravleff, (alias Mandel), A.I., AAAB 482/65a Halinen, O., AAAB 482/65f Jakabsen (Lind), J. (NA)
- <sup>53</sup> Captain Proctor to Commandant, Featherston Military Camp, telegraph 8/5/1919. AD 1 59/156/2 (NA)
- <sup>54</sup> Drill to Defence, Palmerston North, telegram 29/4/1919. AD 1 59/156/1. Also Brig.-General G.S. Richardson to Minister of Defence, 30/9/1919. AAAB 482/37d Skrzypezak, J. (NA)
- <sup>55</sup> Thomas Nipperdey, *Germany from Napoleon to Bismarck, 1800-1866* (Germany, 1983, English translation, Dublin, 1966, p. 40-2. Also ES 22/9/1917, 'Some unconsidered aspects of the war'
- <sup>56</sup> Geoffrey Evans, *Tannenberg 1410/1914* (London, 1970). pp. 62-3.



(Above) The *Auckland Weekly News* captioned this photo: "A Turkish prisoner hanging out his washing." As there was only one Turk on Somes, presumably this is Joseph Meshoullam. Interned from the troopship *Orari* on 9 February 1915, the over-confident Meshoullam claimed to be an Argentinean-born Spanish Jew. His situation was unique in other ways too, in that while the Christian churches appear to have largely ignored any practicing Christian internees on the island, members of Wellington's Hebrew Congregation visited Meshoullam throughout the war and supplied him with such things as Passover Cakes. (Photo: *Auckland Weekly News*, 20/4/1916, p. 4. Personal file reference: AAAB 482/13e, Michalon, J.[sic]- NA)

(Below) Many British ships carried crew who, with the outbreak of war, suddenly found themselves classified as "enemy aliens". The MV *Orari* contributed three more internees to Somes Island when war broke out, these being Albert Fritz Arndt, Arnold Emil Hinz and "August L. Lucenan" (probably August Liebenau). The NZEF's 1914 *War Diary* records that the *Orari* sailed from Wellington on 24 September 1914 with its share of troops. It deposited its passengers at Alexandria on 3 December. On 8 December it headed for England, only to be called back. It finally sailed from Alexandria to New Zealand on 22 December, complete with its new Turkish crew member, Joseph Meshoullam. Of the former German crew members, Hinz had his upper teeth removed during 1916 and spent two years awaiting a promised denture. Justice Chapman finally sorted the matter out in 1918. Meanwhile, Albert Arndt developed insanity in 1917 and, having been declared dangerous, was sent to Porirua Mental Asylum for several weeks. (Photo: Bruce Burr, Palmerston North. Personal file references: AAAB 482/49I, Arndt, K., AAAB 482/37h, Hinz, A., AAAB 482/49j, Libenau, J.[sic])



## II

**Outbreak of War**

Although complex events over a number of years led to World War One, more obvious events sparked off the final countdown. Considered the catalyst, the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria and his wife by a Serbian nationalist at Sarajevo on 28 June 1914, resulted in the 28 July declaration of war by Austria-Hungary on Serbia. The assassin probably belonged to a secret Serbian society called the Black Hand, a movement formed in 1911. This movement, which consisted primarily of army officers and some government officials, became so powerful that its authority challenged that of the Serbian Government. It is interesting, therefore, to note that particularly unruly groups of internees in both New Zealand and Australia were referred to as the Black Hand<sup>1</sup>. It seems highly unlikely, however, that these people would have any link whatsoever to that group.

The next step in the process came with Germany's declaration of war on Russia on 1 August (as Russia refused to cancel its general mobilisation against Austria-Hungary) and then France on 3 August. That night Germany invaded neutral Belgium while en route to France. Despite good relations with Germany in early July (due to an agreement over African colonies), no concern with Serbia nor any express obligation to fight for Russia or France, Great Britain chose to honour an 1839 agreement with Belgium and demanded Germany's withdrawal. When that failed, Britain took its place within the growing network of similar declarations by declaring war on Germany on 4 August and Austria-Hungary on 12 August. It subsequently declared war on Turkey on 5 November and then Bulgaria on 15 October 1915, as those countries became drawn into the conflict.

As with modern international wars, the average New Zealand resident doubtless watched these events unfold with curiosity and excitement, but with little comprehension of how they might personally become involved. A Ruhleben civilian internee, J. Davidson Ketchum, writing later of this period in Germany, said that at the time he believed Germany's version of events<sup>2</sup>. No doubt many newly invented "enemy aliens" would

similarly have believed and been shocked by the British version reported in New Zealand newspapers. The aforementioned pro-Serbian demonstration by 100 Dalmatians outside the Austrian Consul's Auckland office on 31 July, did, however, bring matters closer to home<sup>3</sup>.

Newspapers of the day show that the people many New Zealanders would soon condemn were not loathed by the general public immediately before the war. For example, *The Dominion* of 3 August enthusiastically announced the pending arrival (in September 1914) of eminent German anthropologist, Professor von Luschan. Von Luschan, son-in-law of prominent German scientist, Doctor von Hochstetter, had speaking engagements at Wellington and Christchurch. He and his wife also intended studying the Maori people. A month later, H.F. von Haast, son of Sir Julius von Haast, would write that the von Luschans reached Australia but due to the war could not enter New Zealand<sup>4</sup>. More ominously, the *Evening Post* of 3 August announced that the Defence Department now controlled New Zealand's four main ports<sup>5</sup>.

The *Evening Post* of 3 August recorded that between 250 and 300 Germans lived in Wellington, "and the natural question arises as to what their position will be now that the Fatherland is engaged in open hostilities with France and Russia." Enquiries made at the German Consulate that day "showed that there had been one or two callers who were anxious to find out whether their services would be required." Many had migrated years earlier and some were now naturalised. Even those wishing to return to Germany "either out of anxiety as to the welfare of their families or relatives or for patriotic purposes," would find this difficult. The long sea voyage meant that the war would have practically paralysed shipping by the time they got there. A cablegram from a supplier received by one local importer of German goods, stated that already it could not fulfill orders as it was impossible to get exports away<sup>6</sup>.

The *Wanganui Chronicle* announced on 4 August that Germans liable for service in the German military forces must report immediately to the German Consulate in Wellington. The *Wanganui Chronicle* claimed that at least one "well-known resident" had received

his free railway pass the previous day along with instructions to proceed to Wellington<sup>7</sup>. In light of claims from that consulate, the *Wanganui Chronicle* story was perhaps wrong.

The *Evening Post* of 3 August reported that the Austro-Hungarian leadership had advised the Austrian Consul in Auckland that it had ordered a general mobilisation. Anyone in New Zealand who was "liable to serve in the Austrian army, including all reservists," was to return to Austria at the first opportunity. Meanwhile, those who did not, would be "deprived for all time of the right to inherit property in Austria-Hungary," while their existing property in Austria would be forfeited. Errant soldiers would be dealt with under military law<sup>8</sup>. As many Austrian reservists lacked an affinity with their homeland, their King reportedly even pardoned those guilty of political offences in an attempt to get them back<sup>9</sup>.

*The Dominion* of 4 August claimed that "dozens" of German reservists wishing to serve their country had visited the Wellington Consulate. It added that due to lack of definite instructions Focke could not advise them. The paper also reported the predicament of a young Wellington-based German who had returned home to marry. Before the wedding could take place, he desperately cabled New Zealand, begging his friends to try to get him out of Germany before he was detained for service. The paper considered that extracting him would be impossible, and that "being a German on German soil he will in all probability have to go to the front."<sup>10</sup> Another unnamed reservist, when arrested in Otago on 16 August, said that Germany contemplated war in 1912, so he left to avoid it. He wrongly considered that Germany's immense resources could sustain such a war for years<sup>11</sup>.

On 5 August New Zealanders learned that Great Britain, and therefore its Empire, was also at war<sup>12</sup>. Carl Seegner, Auckland's German Consul, had, however, not received any official confirmation from Germany that a state of war existed between Britain and Germany. In fact, no information had come from official sources for the previous ten days. When this telegram arrived, he intended to vacate the Consulate and, having been naturalised 35 years earlier, to become a private New Zealand citizen. He aimed to hand

the Consulate, and its official documentation, over to the Consular representative of some other power, probably United States' Acting-Consul, Mr L.A. Bachelder<sup>13</sup>.

Eugene Langguth, the Auckland-based Austrian Consul, advised the same evening that he had received no confirmation that Britain and Austria-Hungary were at war. No information had come from Austria-Hungary at all for four days. If such information arrived he also intended passing his Consular material to the American Consul. He hoped to remain in New Zealand despite being an Austrian subject<sup>14</sup>.

The *Evening Post* of 6 August provided a taste of the ethnic resentment that was to come, with reports of a "deplorable" anti-German demonstration in Melbourne. The crowd of drunken hotheads ran amok during a period of "temporary madness," but duly sobered up with the help of "policemen's batons." The *Evening Post* reminded its readers that "many of the Britons' Teutonic cousins" were naturalised British subjects who had "proved themselves exceedingly good citizens and settlers." Some wished to help defend their various adopted homelands and "every possible care should be taken to discourage disgraceful and cruel persecution of people who are not responsible for the turn of events in Europe."<sup>15</sup> The next day the *Evening Post* reported that, despite a patriotic parade through Wellington's streets the previous evening:

So far there has been an entire absence of Jingoistic outbursts or any display against foreigners. Furthermore, last night the streets were quite free of any unpleasant exhibitions. The task of the police has been light<sup>16</sup>.

Several German-owned cargo ships were en route to New Zealand when war erupted. The *Stolzenfels* and *Wilderfels* were en route from New York, while the *Wismar*, the first steamer from the German Australian Line to leave Hamburg on a newly established direct Germany-New Zealand route, should have reached Wellington in late August. Shipping circles considered that as they had radios, the ships would probably have diverted to neutral ports. The *Wismar* later reappeared in Java. Meanwhile, the Sydney headquarters of the North German Lloyd Company (Norddeutscher Lloyd Company) told its Wellington agents not to make any more bookings<sup>17</sup>.

The Harris Street office of Messrs. Castendyk & Focke, the agents for the North German Lloyds Company, also accommodated Wellington's German Consulate. Eberhard Focke was both company manager and Consular Agent. German reservists wishing to return home reported there, and by 7 August Focke had reportedly told several they had little chance of getting home. Meanwhile, the Consulate itself awaited advice from Sydney as to whether it should close<sup>18</sup>. That night, a group of young men attacked the office, hurling stones through four windows. They also tore down shipping and consular plates. The next day a telephone insulator, a telegraph arm, a couple of "ugly-looking bolts with nuts on" and a tumbler were found lying outside the office. Focke, who was fated to hold a prominent position on *Somes*, received the sympathy of indignant friends at the incident. Along with 35 years in Wellington and five in London, he had been naturalised for 25 years. His son formerly served in D Battery.<sup>19</sup> Some of Focke's "many friends" paid to repair the building, while the police ensured there was no more damage. Focke and Castendyk had heard of a possible attack and so insured the windows earlier the same day. Castendyk was Swiss, but rumours mistook him for a German<sup>20</sup>.

Enraged mobs overseas also targeted consulates. For example, the *Manawatu Evening Standard* reported that on 7 August a mob stoned the German and Austrian Consulates in Winnipeg, Canada, and partially wrecked them. Those consulates closed as a result<sup>21</sup>. Canada went on to establish 26 "concentration camps" in which to house 8,579 enemy alien prisoners, of whom 7,762 were ordinarily Canadian residents<sup>22</sup>.

Dealing with enemy aliens, effectively a contingent of trained enemy soldiers within New Zealand's borders, presented the police with a brief dilemma. How did one get them to report to the Police?<sup>23</sup> After a flurry of communications between Police Head Office and the various Police Districts, Inspector John Cullen, Commissioner of Police, told them on 7 August that the Press Association would circulate the instruction through newspapers<sup>24</sup>. Cullen's press statement advised that German and Austrian reservists could not leave New Zealand. Furthermore, they were to report immediately to the nearest police office to supply their name, address and occupation. They were not to leave their homes without providing this information to the police<sup>25</sup>. The "few" who

reported to Wellington's Police Headquarters also learned that they must not leave the city or its environs<sup>26</sup>.

On 8 August Cullen instructed the police to arrest all German officers and reservists as prisoners of war. In addition - as Britain was not yet officially at war with Austria-Hungary - they were also ordered to watch Austrian officers and reservists<sup>27</sup>. The Wellington Police District received additional orders to "be in readiness with a few police to act on special instructions which may be sent to you this evening or Monday afternoon"<sup>28</sup>. Thus began the arrests of those German reservists who had identified themselves.

Confusion and a flurry of communications between Head Office and the Police Districts punctuated the next few days. Superintendent Mitchell of Dunedin asked whether his two reservists would be detained in a military or civil prison and who, therefore, should sign the arrest warrant. The reply advised that he needed no arrest warrant<sup>29</sup>. Superintendent Dwyer of Christchurch asked how he should deal with his prisoners and where should he detain them<sup>30</sup>. Inspector Wilson made a similar request from Wanganui<sup>31</sup>. Cullen told them to hand all prisoners of war over to the Defence authorities at the nearest District Headquarters<sup>32</sup>.

Arrested on the first day, Carl Topp, a 35-year-old Taumarunui hairdresser, found himself in Auckland. There, he and others came under the control of the Defence authorities, which in turn escorted them to Wellington<sup>33</sup>. Similar scenes occurred throughout the country. For example, police arrested two men at Port Chalmers on 8 August. They arrested and then released another at Milton, when he proved not to be a reservist. Amongst about six arrested around Canterbury, was Gottfried Heinsen, the secretary to Christchurch's German Consul. The "well-to-do" Mr M. Kurzell of Temuka was arrested on Sunday evening, while a fireman from the *Manuka* was arrested at Bluff on Monday, 10 August. Police arrested two in Wellington, and planned to arrest about 20 more. On Monday afternoon a special train left Auckland for Wellington carrying 261 New Zealand troops and 32 prisoners of war<sup>34</sup>.

Apparently instructions issued from Wellington remained unclear. Inspector Wilson of Wanganui considered it unnecessary to arrest naturalised persons or those over forty years of age<sup>35</sup>. Superintendent Kiely of Auckland asked on 14 August which government department he should debit with the resulting arrest and escorting costs. These were chargeable to the Defence Department<sup>36</sup>.

Meanwhile, as late as 8 August, Focke's superiors had still not contacted him regarding possible closure of the Consulate. He told the *Evening Post* that he could not simply close it himself. Considering that perhaps Britain and Germany were negotiating over the matter, Focke added that "during the German-Danish war in 1864 Consuls on both sides continued to act, but during the Franco-German hostilities the Consuls of both nations gave up their functions"<sup>37</sup>.

In fact, the British Government's instructions to New Zealand required that all German Consuls should leave the country immediately. A Consulate Clerk, or other unofficial representative could remain to tidy up their personal affairs. It added that "consular appointments of British subjects under (the) German Government have of course terminated upon the outbreak of war"<sup>38</sup>. On 9 August, F.H. Dillon Bell, the Minister of Internal Affairs, prepared instructions for the police to visit New Zealand's five German Consulates. These consulates were those of Carl Seegner (Auckland), F.A. Krull (Wanganui), Eberhard Focke (Wellington), Karl Joosten (Christchurch) and Willi Fels (Dunedin).

In addition to the British Government's instructions, the police's orders included informing each consul that if he claimed naturalisation, that not only was his consular appointment terminated, but also any subsequent communications he might have with the German Government would be treasonable. In addition, the police were to seize, seal up and remove all papers at the Consulate relating to consular matters. If the consul left the country he could take his papers with him. If not, New Zealand would retain them until the war ended. Police instructions added that businesses run from the same premises were not to be interfered with more than necessary. On Monday afternoon, 10 August, the police arrived at Focke's office and requested his consular papers. They took

letterbooks and other documentation, and also removed the consular sign from the door. New Zealand's three other German Consulates received the same treatment. Contrary to earlier reports, the *Evening Post* added that "the powers of the Consulate will not be handed over to the representative of a third Power, as is sometimes done on the outbreak of hostilities"<sup>39</sup>. The Public Trust Office in Wellington held the material from four of the five consulates, apparently for over a decade, despite protests from Germany and even, in 1917, from the British Government<sup>40</sup>.

The fifth "consulate" was that of Frederick August Krull, former senior German Consul, of Wanganui. However, the 78-year-old turned out to have retired some two years earlier. Of the five German and one Austrian consuls, only Fels and Krull avoided internment. A member of the Hallenstein family that owned the clothing store Hallenstein Bros. Ltd., Fels lost his only son in France in October 1917<sup>41</sup>. Krull died following a stroke on 28 November 1914, which in turn his family attributed to the war. Despite his ethnicity, his funeral became Wanganui's largest "for years"<sup>42</sup>. Interestingly, even Paul Hansen, Denmark's Auckland vice-consul, found himself interned on Moutihi because fate caused him to be born in Germany<sup>43</sup>.

As the first week of war ended, anti-German sentiments were already hardening and those most accessible bore the brunt. On Tuesday evening, 11 August, a British seaman named Joseph Ravenscroft approached middle-aged baker, Charles Henry Thielemann, in Grey Street, Wellington, and said: "You're a German, aren't you?" When Thielemann confirmed this, Ravenscroft punched him twice in the chin. The Magistrate fined Ravenscroft 20 shillings and warned him against assaulting citizens, whether German or not<sup>44</sup>. Thielemann later resided on Somes<sup>45</sup>.

The *Evening Post's* editorial on 12 August warned against mis-placed anti-Germanism:

New Zealand has a number of Germans who are good sturdy settlers; they have made their homes here; their interests are here, and they are regarded as New Zealanders by British friends who admire the manly qualities and the steady industry of their Teutonic cousins. Yet some of these colonists are still liable for military service in their Fatherland; they are classed as reservists, and as such they are being arrested and taken to Somes Island. We presume that this indiscriminate capture of reservists is by order of the Imperial authorities.

The editorial optimistically added that it was inconceivable that the Government would imagine that dragging “peaceful settlers away from their homes and families was a necessary precaution for the public welfare.” It explained that reasons this might happen would be:

(1) To prevent reservists from returning to Germany where they would join an army; (2) to prevent reservists from doing damage or injury within a British country; (3) to impress the German Government and Germans generally with the serious nuisance to themselves of a state of war with Britain<sup>46</sup>.

The editorial questioned how German reservists might travel the 13,000 miles between New Zealand and their native land:

How many reservists here, so far from the chief theatre of war, are likely to resort to stupid tactics of wanton mischief, which would inevitably recoil on themselves? It is possible that the authorities may have good reason to arrest some Germans, of unsettled habits or uncertain character, but well-behaved men, who are manifestly desirable members of the community, should not have the same treatment as the latest arrival from Germany.<sup>47</sup>

It added that Britain’s position differed, in that it would be relatively easy for reservists to slip home to Germany. If such people remained free there, they could assist the interests of their homeland in many ways, including spying and damaging vital property. However, Britain took the precaution of ordering the internment of all reservists in its empire, regardless of their status within the German military system.

The *Evening Post* editorial concluded that rigidly reinforcing this order in outlying parts of the Empire would be a mistake. While war existed between the two homelands, Britain was:

Not necessarily at war with all Germans throughout the British Dominions. We have no doubt whatever that the public of Australasia, where German immigrants, glad to find freedom in a new world, have proved themselves among the best of settlers, would be very pleased to have a modification of a decree which has evidently come from London<sup>48</sup>.

In the first weeks of war, the *Evening Post* further attempted to educate its readers on the predicament of Germans living in New Zealand. For example, it interviewed an unnaturalised German living in Wellington, who explained how the German military reserve system worked. It added that the authorities required that this man report daily to the police<sup>49</sup>.

For New Zealanders of distant German descent, choosing allegiance to Britain was possibly not difficult. For example, on 9 August, Marton's Lutheran congregation declared its:

Allegiance to Great Britain and (expressed its) willingness to assist in the defence of the country. It was also decided to contribute towards the defence fund by doubling the collection for the day<sup>50</sup>.

The German residents of Upper Moutere followed Marton's lead by issuing a statement to the effect that:

The residents of German extraction who for so many years have made their homes here without molestation on terms of equality with the rest of the community and enjoyed the protection and assistance of the Government of this colony will stand shoulder to shoulder, man for man, with any other inhabitants of this colony to defend its shores and institutions, their homes and families, against any foe whatsoever<sup>51</sup>.

Then on 12 August, Halcombe's German Lutheran community also publicly expressed its loyalty to the British Empire, offering both direct and indirect support. A collection it held raised £5/12/- toward the Feilding district's war fund<sup>52</sup>.

On 7 August, an Austrian (almost certainly a Dalmatian) deputised to make a statement, told *The Dominion* that Austrians in New Zealand would stand shoulder to shoulder with New Zealanders if the need arose. "We are all loyal to the Union Jack," he said, "and we will take up the rifle if the call is made"<sup>53</sup>. Three hundred Dalmatians and Croatians in the Northern Wairoa district also conveyed a message of sympathy toward the British side. They advised that they were all of the Slavonic race and had renounced their political and hereditary rights in Austria. They had refused to return home and added that they considered themselves "faithful allies and friends of the New Zealand Government, and (were) prepared the join the British colours and fight the common foe"<sup>54</sup>.

Others took a stand on an individual basis. For example, Carl Sauer, of Wellington, interviewed in Pahiatua where he was musical adjudicator in the local competitions, stated that all Australasian-based Germans who had lived under the British flag and enjoyed its privileges would help defend it. Despite naturalisation, these views and his description of Australasia as "the two most precious gems in the Crown's Dominions",

Sauer quickly saw his business as a music teacher dissolve. Doubtless his dismay increased in December 1914 when he unsuccessfully sought permission, via Wellington's American Consular Agent, to leave the country to take up a position with a San Francisco orchestra<sup>55</sup>. He did, however, remain free. Max Kreissig, also naturalised, placed his furniture manufacturing premises in Wellington into the hands of the Defence Department free of charge for three months<sup>56</sup>. He also remained free.

Lifestyle, suspicions of eccentricity and a badly timed alleged threat to shoot "Britishers", saw Werner Tobin catch the eye of the authorities. An Invercargill bush worker in his late forties, Tobin had spent almost a lifetime in New Zealand. However, when recording that he was charged with carrying loaded firearms, the newspapers also described his long beard and his hut on the Maitai Riverbank. Tobin vigorously opposed police suggestions in court on 12 August that he might not be "right in the head" and claimed that he only carried his rifle in the bush for sport. However, after six months in Dunedin Gaol he also found himself on Somes. His neighbours were no doubt extremely relieved<sup>57</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 13/1/1918, AAAB 482/43c, Erdmann, H. (NA). Also (re: Holdsworth Concentration Camp) EP 2/6/1916 7(5), 20/4/1920 7(7).

<sup>2</sup> J. Davidson Ketchum, *Ruhleben: A Prison Camp Society*, (Toronto, Canada, 1965). p. xvi.

<sup>3</sup> Trlin, pp. 99.

<sup>4</sup> *The Dominion* (Dom) 3/8/1914 6(8), 12/9/1914 9(3).

<sup>5</sup> EP 3/8/1914, 8(6); also *New Zealand Gazette*, 1914, p. 3074.

<sup>6</sup> EP 3/8/1914, 6(8)

<sup>7</sup> *Wanganui Chronicle* (WC) 4/8/1914 4(6)

<sup>8</sup> EP 3/8/1914, 8(6)

<sup>9</sup> EP 8/8/1914, 6(3)

<sup>10</sup> Dom 4/8/1914 6(4)

<sup>11</sup> *Manawatu Herald* (MH) 18/8/1914 2(8)

<sup>12</sup> EP 5/8/1914 8(6)

<sup>13</sup> EP 8/8/1914, 2(5)

<sup>14</sup> EP 6/8/1914, 4(5)

<sup>15</sup> EP 6/8/1914, 6(6)

<sup>16</sup> EP 7/8/1914, 8(6)

<sup>17</sup> EP 8/8/1914, 2(5), 30/9/1914 7(7)

<sup>18</sup> EP 8/8/1914, 2(5), 11/8/1914, 6(9)

<sup>19</sup> EP 8/8/1914, 4(8)

<sup>20</sup> EP 10/8/1914, 6(7)

<sup>21</sup> ES 8/8/1914 2(4)

<sup>22</sup> John Herd Thompson, *Ethnic Minorities During Two World Wars* (Ottawa, 1991). pp. 4-10.

<sup>23</sup> AAAB 478/2av Enemy Reservists. (NA)

<sup>24</sup> J. Cullen to Superintendent Mitchell, Dunedin, 7/8/1914. AAAB 478/2av (NA)

<sup>25</sup> MH 8/8/1914, 2(6)

<sup>26</sup> EP 8/8/1914, 6(3)

<sup>27</sup> J. Cullen to all Police Districts, 8/8/1914. AAAB 478/2av (NA).

- <sup>28</sup> J. Cullen to Superintendent Ellison, Wellington, 8/8/1914. AAAB 478/2av (NA).
- <sup>29</sup> Superintendent A.J. Mitchell to Police Commissioner, 8/8/1914; Cullen to Mitchell, 10/8/1914. AAAB 478/2av (NA).
- <sup>30</sup> Superintendent "N.W." (?) Dwyer to Cullen, 8/8/1914. AAAB 478/2av (NA).
- <sup>31</sup> Inspector Edward Wilson to Cullen, 8/8/1914. AAAB 478/2av (NA).
- <sup>32</sup> Cullen to all Inspectors and Superintendents of Police c8/8/1914. AAAB 478/2av (NA).
- <sup>33</sup> Inspector A.H. Wright to Cullen, 8/8/1914; Cullen to Superintendent Kiely, Auckland, 8/8/1914. AAAB 478/2av (NA).
- <sup>34</sup> EP 11/8/1914 3(5) & 8(7)
- <sup>35</sup> Inspector E. Wilson to Cullen, 10/8/1914, AAAB 478/2av (NA).
- <sup>36</sup> Superintendent Kiely to Cullen, 14/8/1914; Cullen to Kiely, 14/8/1914, AAAB 478/2av (NA).
- <sup>37</sup> EP 8/8/1914 6(3)
- <sup>38</sup> H.D. Bell to the Solicitor General, 9/8/1914. AAAB 478/12ap Consulate German: Archives. (NA)
- <sup>39</sup> EP 11/8/1914 6(9)
- <sup>40</sup> Burr (1996) pp. 9-10, 37
- <sup>41</sup> Dimitri Anson, 'Willi Fels, 1858-1946', in Department of Internal Affairs, *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, Volume 3 (Wellington, 1996). pp. 155-6. Also *The Great War, 1914-1918: New Zealand Expeditionary Force, Roll of Honour* (Government Printer, Wellington, 1924). p. 92.
- <sup>42</sup> WC 30/11/1914 'Personal'; EP 2/12/1914 6(9); Palmerston North Group of New Zealand Society of Genealogists, *Early Settlers Index* - 'Frederick Augustus Krull file', containing a photocopied typescript by Athol L. Kirk, entitled 'Frederick Augustus Krull'.
- <sup>43</sup> Mr Ostler to Sir James Allen (and attachments), 5/12/1918. AD 1 59/156 (NA). EP 20/4/1916 6(9), 26/4/1916 6(7).
- <sup>44</sup> EP 12/8/1914 6(7)
- <sup>45</sup> AAAB 482/241, Theimen (sic), C. (N.A.)
- <sup>46</sup> EP 12/8/1914 6(4-5)
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>49</sup> EP 13/8/1914 6(7)
- <sup>50</sup> MH 13/8/1914 2(7)
- <sup>51</sup> EP 14/8/1914 6(7)
- <sup>52</sup> ES 15/8/1914 4(6), FS 12/8/1914 3(3), 13/8/1914 3(3), 15/8/1914 4(2), 17/8/1914 3(2), 27/8/1914 3(2).
- <sup>53</sup> Dom 8/8/1914 6(6)
- <sup>54</sup> EP 11/8/1914 8(3). Similar comments appeared on EP 18/8/1914 8(1)
- <sup>55</sup> EP 6/8/1914 4(5), 18/11/1914 8(8) [a letter by Charles Sauer]. Also communications between A.E. White, the American Consular Agent, and Lieut. Col. H.E. Pilkington, 1/12/1914, 8/12/1914. AAAB 482/231, Sauer, C. (N.A.)
- <sup>56</sup> EP 11/8/1914 8(3)
- <sup>57</sup> EP 13/8/1914 2(9); AAAB 482/14a, Tobin, V. (NA)



Major Dugald Matheson (seated left) and Second Lieutenant Stan Rogers (seated right), the Assistant Commandant, pose with a youthful collection of guards sometime between August 1914 and April 1915, when Rogers left the Somes Island Interment Camp Guard. (Photo: F-112326-1/2, R. Hart Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library)

## III

## From Quarantine Station to Internment Camp

New Zealand matched its scramble to locate and intern Germans with an urgent need to enlist guards to hold them. Second Lieutenant Stan Rogers, ordinarily a carpenter at the Petone Railway Workshops, transferred to the Defence Department's temporary staff shortly before the war. Although his memoirs claim the transfer occurred in May 1914, this seems unlikely<sup>1</sup>. His job involved preparing attestation forms for future New Zealand soldiers and 5000 forms for future prisoners of war<sup>2</sup>. While his military records do not mention this service, clearly internment was an issue before the declaration of war<sup>3</sup>.

In a letter to his brother, supposedly written on 7 August 1914, Rogers remarked:

It seems a long time since I wrote you, but things have moved. Yes, we are in it now, quite a lot of things have happened. I have an office and staff of my own. Captain Skelley came down from up the hill and asked me would I take on Assistant Commandant to Somes Island. A request is an order at G.H.Q.

He added that he was directly under Colonel Chaytor, the New Zealand Expeditionary Force's (NZEF) principle personnel and logistics officer, and had a staff of 21 men, 5 NCOs, a sergeant clerk, 2 clerks, an officer orderly and a batman, 30 men in total. In addition:

All P.O.W. go through my hands and I am responsible for the IB forms and their history sheets. My office is at G.H.Q., and a Major Matheson is Commandant on the Island. He is a retired schoolmaster from Wellington College. He is a funny old chap - he has looked after boys so long it is in the marrow of his bones, he just treats everyone like a school boy<sup>4</sup>.

More likely, the Internment Camp Guard assembled on 9 August 1914<sup>5</sup>, thus coinciding with the arrival of the first internees.

On 10 August, Matheson and Rogers officially took up their respective positions<sup>6</sup>. Colonel Chaytor's job description for the pair, dated 16 August, required that they requisition the Officer Commanding the Wellington District for guards. They would guard the island, meet prisoners arriving from around the country and escort them to Somes. Chaytor's instructions also described the type of personal records required for each internee, and stated that they could have reasonable liberty on the island. Still, they

had to be “warned that any serious insubordination or any attempt to escape will render them liable to be fired upon”<sup>7</sup>.

Chaytor informed them that the *Manual of Military Law*, Chapter XIV, paragraph 66 onwards, set out the way to treat internees. In addition, he said that a Medical Officer would visit the island daily, while the internees’ letters were to receive official stamps and then be sent, open, to Headquarters for inspection by the censor. The instructions added that: “Anyone approaching the Island without permission or who fails to obey any orders given by the sentry or guard will be fired upon”<sup>8</sup>.

Unfortunately, this relatively simplistic approach to guarding civilian prisoners of war, was to draw criticism from Justice Chapman, at the 1918 Royal Commission of Inquiry into allegations of ill-treatment on the island. Chaytor, however, was also playing a “pivotal planning role” in organising the assembly and dispatch of the 1,400-strong detachment that occupied German Samoa on 29 August 1914. In addition, he was organising and equipping the 8,427 men and 3,815 horses that, on 16 October 1914, sailed for the Middle East as the main body of the NZEF. The rapid creation of these two contingents has been described as “one of the most skillful feats of organisation and administration in New Zealand’s military history”<sup>9</sup>. Small wonder, then, that creating contingency plans for a small unwanted group on a tiny island, did not demand much in-depth attention.

The first guards were territorials, with 30 present by late August 1914. Some, possibly most, were NZEF hopefuls who perhaps were underage and whose parents refused to consent to them joining it. Eleven university, teachers college and technical college students joined the Guard at the expense of their year’s education, six starting on 9 August<sup>10</sup>. Probably some knew Matheson from his former senior position in the Wellington College Cadets.

Rogers, whose association with Somes lasted until April 1915, later wrote and then revised his memoirs, based on letters to his brother Harold. Although dates are unreliable - and are some are incorrect - his tone corresponds to other sources. There is evidence of

exaggeration. He duly recorded that the first internees arrived soon after his appointment. He found the first “quite arrogant because he knew they were winning the Jolly Old War.” Rogers thought his job included taming “these birds before they go to the island,” and amongst the first of those supposedly “tamed” was 21-year-old Paul Kabierski. Arrested on 12 August (but in fact taken several days earlier), he became one of Somes’ tougher customers<sup>11</sup>. Two guards with fixed bayonets helped secure Kabierski’s name and regiment number. A beating from Rogers secured his remaining details. Matheson later told Rogers he “must never do that again, it may cause complication, whatever that is”<sup>12</sup>.

On Monday afternoon, 10 August, a special train carrying 261 troops left Auckland<sup>13</sup>. The bands and warm receptions the troops enjoyed at wayside stations, were not intended for the thirty-two Germans also aboard the train<sup>14</sup>. The *Evening Post* reported that:

On the platforms of (their three) carriages were guards with fixed bayonets, to see that no attempt was made by the captives to regain liberty....As they put their heads out of the windows it was observed that mostly they were young men who would be liable to serve in the army of the Fatherland.

The *Evening Post* described the internees’ welcoming party on the platform as two lines of troops from the railway corps, complete with fixed bayonets. From there:

Under a strong escort the Germans were taken to the Alexandra Barracks, via Jervois-quay. The scene as they were marched through the streets was an impressive one, and the spectators realised it was no superficial formality, but the stern custom of war that was being complied with. Accompanying the escort were a couple of officers with drawn swords, while at the rear rode two mounted police constables. The men will in all probability be interned at Somes Island<sup>15</sup>.

12 August 1914 is the official date of arrest for the vast majority of the original internees, despite evidence indicating most entered custody several days earlier<sup>16</sup>. A Court of Enquiry in 1916, seeking £34 stolen from an internee during this time, described the frantic pace and long hours - especially on the second day - required of soldiers processing the internees<sup>17</sup>.

On the evening of 12 August, 90 Germans boarded the *Admiral* bound for Somes<sup>18</sup>. As well as the 32 from Auckland, including members of a well-known German band, there

were 20 seafarers, a master tailor, a traveller for a Portuguese firm, tradesmen and mechanics<sup>19</sup>. At this point, Lieutenant W.P. Thring, the officer in charge of Alexandra Barracks, passed the internees into the care of Major Matheson<sup>20</sup>. Suddenly an island that normally accommodated quarantined livestock and a couple of lighthouse families became a German settlement<sup>21</sup>. The *Evening Post* recorded that the internees would live in the old quarantine station, where there was a “good water supply.” One military officer summed up their situation by saying: “They will be better looked after than if they were fighting for their country”<sup>22</sup>.

Before leaving for *Somes*, the internees learned they could apply for parole by naming friends who could vouch for their good character. Already thirteen were on parole with instructions to report daily to the police. Unfortunately, parole proved an illusion for many. Apparent friendships either evaporated or the friend’s own character failed police scrutiny. Sometimes possible genuine friendships - such as when internees cited people they boarded with - were discounted by the police. Landlords, after all, benefited financially from their border and might consider any income he provided to be more important than their country’s security. Some internees, especially newly-arrived seamen and a commercial traveller arrested in Auckland as he disembarked from Sydney, simply had no friends in New Zealand<sup>23</sup>.

Wartime precautions saw the navigation lights at Pencarrow Heads and on *Somes* extinguished on 13 August. The waters off *Somes* also became off-limits and unauthorised vessels soon learned to avoid the island<sup>24</sup>. For example, on 23 August a sentry from the island fired on a fishing party of eight, as they cut through the forbidden zone en route to a new fishing spot. While the first shot had no effect, the second ricocheted off the water and grazed a crew member’s stomach. When approached by the *Evening Post*, Colonel Chaytor said he was very pleased that the sentry fired, although he had aimed at the boat:

The sooner people understand that there is no nonsense about this the better [Chaytor said]. The sentries have orders to fire on any boat that refuses to obey instructions<sup>25</sup>.

Meanwhile, once they got over the shock (the victim having promptly fainted), the fishermen treated the incident as a “good joke”<sup>26</sup>.

Only days after war broke out, concern for internees' families became an issue. The *Evening Post's* sub-editorial recorded:

Dependents of some of the German reservists who have been taken to Somes Island are likely to be in a state of want. Breadwinners have been removed, and therefore a dearth of bread threatens.

This dilemma, the *Evening Post* warned, was not the fault of the husbands and fathers. Their arrests were not from contributing to the outbreak of war, but "in the public interest." Therefore, logically, the public should help the needy dependents. This was the British thing to do<sup>27</sup>.

Wellington's Mayor, Mr J.P. Luke, assisted by former German Consul, Eberhard Focke, took an interest in the plight of these dependents. The Mayor assured the *Evening Post* that such families would receive relief in accordance with their needs, along with other distress cases that required help<sup>28</sup>. Focke said on 15 August that every provision had been made for two Wellington families who were in dire financial straits. He had also asked the former Consuls in Auckland, Christchurch and Dunedin, to make the same provisions for other effected families<sup>29</sup>.

On 22 August, the Mayor and Mayoress, along with women from the Countess of Liverpool Fund, visited Somes to see what help the internees needed. Some proved to be short of clothing. They also needed something to occupy their time. The visitors found that some men had families and the speed of their arrests meant they lacked time to make provision for them. In particular, they found:

One sad-faced man has left a wife and five children in possible need, but his name is taken down by the kindly Mayor, who, with the Mayoress, is eager to find out wants and alleviate distress<sup>30</sup>.

This was almost certainly Ludwig Eder from Foxton, who, unlike his two brothers, soon returned on parole to his grateful family and and his almost equally grateful former employer. The Government returned his brothers to Germany in 1919<sup>31</sup>.

Assistance to internees' families, authorised in October 1914, took the form of funds supplied by the Hospital and Charitable Aid Board. However, half the sum concerned

derived from the Government<sup>32</sup>. Unfortunately, perhaps influenced by prejudice, the Board did not willingly hand over money and when it did the amount given was extremely limited. Conrad Nickel received parole in November 1914 only to be reinterned in January 1916 for alleged disloyal remarks. In the meantime he had earned 12/6 per day as a cook on Somes. Elizabeth, his English-born wife, attempted to gain funds from the Charitable Aid Board only to be declined due to her husband's previous high earnings and the fact that he should have saved some money. The money, she said, had been spent on high medical expenses (she was also pregnant) and funeral costs following the death of her baby son Clarence. Despite a request from the Adjutant General to re-employ him on Somes as a cook, Matheson refused, but suggested alternative Defence Department employment for him. He subsequently earned some money for her by performing other work on the island<sup>33</sup>.

By April 1916, Mrs Nickel's landlord sought to clarify her financial position and a Defence Department report revealed that her poor health and pregnancy prevented her from working. Meanwhile she and her four-year-old daughter, May, were receiving "bare rations" from the local Charitable Aid Board, which refused to assist her with her rent of 11/- per week. Her landlord threatened to evict her and she had already been evicted from a previous house. In addition, the Charitable Aid Board refused to contribute toward fuel or lighting. Mrs Nickel said she and her daughter had gone without meals several times due to the small amount of food allowed them by the Charitable Aid Board. Other internees' wives felt compelled to seek employment due to the impossibility of living on the small amount of food the Charitable Aid Board allowed them<sup>34</sup>. Doubtless that was the Board's objective.

Elizabeth Nickel's descendants look back with dismay at her experiences during this time. Having arrived in 1913, she could not return to England once the war started. With her husband interned and her own relatives in England, she became very homesick. By the time her baby arrived, she had no home and despite explaining her predicament, when the baby was fourteen days old the Matron told her to leave hospital and that her predicament was not her (the Matron's) concern. Elizabeth was left crying on the steps

of the maternity hospital holding her newborn daughter. She felt she could not turn to other people she knew as they had relatives away at the war.

Eventually Elizabeth found a room and employment at a laundry. However, after three days doing this heavy work she collapsed. During the three or four days she lay on her bed, no-one came looking for her. Meanwhile the baby, Kathleen, suckled from her by herself, while May fed herself bread from the table. At that point Elizabeth realised she could not cope and so asked the Home of Compassion if they could take in the children<sup>35</sup>.

Anna Knab, Wilhelm Knab's English de facto wife of five years, refused or perhaps feared approaching Christchurch's Charitable Aid Board for assistance in September 1914. Perhaps her apparent pride was due to the Board's possible response when her marital status was discovered. As at 8 October 1914, Major Matheson considered Knab the only internee on Somes whose dependents resided in New Zealand. Despite efforts to arrange assistance for Anna Stevenson (Knab), her elderly father, her young son and nephew, by war's end her life had moved on. Another of her sons had been killed in the war and she wanted nothing to do with Knab<sup>36</sup>.

Elizabeth Nickel's daughter recalls hearing that when Elizabeth visited Somes the other internees abused her because of her British birth. Meanwhile the New Zealanders on shore abused her as the wife of a German as she came and went from the island. Certainly conditions provided for families were spartan. For example, in early 1917 Eberhard Focke, himself an internee by this point, asked on behalf of men with families in Wellington that perhaps more could be done to assist them. At that time visitors could come to the island once a fortnight and, despite the time spent awaiting the boat's departure from the mainland or at sea, the time spent actually visiting amounted to perhaps as little as 20 minutes. Furthermore, no shelter from the weather was provided for visitors, who undoubtedly included very young children.

While Focke's request that Wellington men might occasionally visit their families fell on deaf ears, wives received permission to visit the island weekly, provided Matheson gave

his consent. At that time about a dozen people visited the island each fortnight. Conditions for families of internees aboard the SS *Janie Seddon*, the Defence Department vessel that serviced the island for most of the war, also presented a problem. Matheson described its sheltered accommodation as “very unsuitable for women in wet weather,” and said the only suitable cabin available could accommodate about eight people. This situation proved “embarrassing” when the wives or relatives of officials were aboard at the same time as those of prisoners. Matheson asked if a moveable canvas shelter could be placed on the deck, in part in the interests of the crew and Guard, as sometimes the Guard were obliged to shelter in the crew’s sleeping or dining quarters. The Inspector of Machinery objected to the canvas shelter (doubtless due to its potential fire risk), while the *Janie Seddon’s* accommodation was also judged to be ample for members of the Guard, Officers and visitors. Matheson was, however, asked why some kind of shelter for visitors could not be provided<sup>37</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Stan Rogers to Harold, 20/5/1914. MS-Papers-5553-1 Letters, Rogers, Stanley Dick (WTU)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 29/6/1914.

<sup>3</sup> Statement of Service, No. 2/347 Rogers, Captain S.D. (Personnel Archive, NZDF)

<sup>4</sup> Stan Rogers to Harold, 7/8/1914. MS-Papers-5553-1 (WTU) Despite the date of this letter, it also refers to events known to have occurred a week later.

<sup>5</sup> Pvt. Edgar Riley to D. Matheson, 15/9/1914. AD 1 15/161, Guards, Somes Island, General File (NA)

<sup>6</sup> Notice: G.O. 307/1914, ‘Internment Camp for Prisoners of War, Somes Island’, in No. 7118, Matheson, Major D. (Personnel Archive, NZDF)

<sup>7</sup> E.W.C. Chaytor to Major Matheson, 16/8/1914. No. 7118, Matheson. (Personnel Archive, NZDF)

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Mike Wicksteed, ‘Chaytor, Edward Walter Clervaux, 1868-1939’, in Department of Internal Affairs, *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, Volume 3, (Wellington, 1996). pp. 93-4.

<sup>10</sup> Pvt. Edgar Riley to D. Matheson, 15/9/1914. AD 1 15/161 (NA)

<sup>11</sup> AAAB 482/39b, Kabierski, P. (NA)

<sup>12</sup> Stan Rogers to Harold, 7/8/1914. MS-Papers-5553-1 (WTU) In this letter Rogers mistakenly refers to Kabierski as Robierdne.

<sup>13</sup> EP 11/8/1914 8(4)

<sup>14</sup> EP 11/8/1914 3(5)

<sup>15</sup> EP 11/8/1914 8(7)

<sup>16</sup> e.g. AAAB 478/2av, Enemy Reservists, especially Insp. A.H. Wright to (Police) Commissioner, 8/8/1914, re Carl Topp. AAAB 482/27d, Topp, C. Also, internee files studied include SI No. 1 to SI No. 135, and others. AAAB 482/26h Schwarz, F. describes early activities. (NA)

<sup>17</sup> AAAB 482/26h (NA)

<sup>18</sup> EP 18/8/1914 8(2-3)

<sup>19</sup> EP 13/8/1914 8(2)

<sup>20</sup> Court of Enquiry, re loss of F. Schwarz’s money, 1/9/1916, AAAB 482/26h (NA)

<sup>21</sup> EP 18/8/1914 8(2-3)

<sup>22</sup> EP 13/8/1914 8(2)

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> EP 14/8/1914 8(1)

<sup>25</sup> EP 25/8/1914 6(8)

<sup>26</sup> Dom 25/8/1914 6(7). Two similar reports of boating parties inadvertently coming under fire from Somes in 1918 appear in EP 21/10/1918 8(8) and 22/10/1918 6(7).

<sup>27</sup> EP 14/8/1914 6(6)

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<sup>28</sup> EP 14/8/1914 8(3)

<sup>29</sup> EP 15/8/1914 8(3-4)

<sup>30</sup> EP 24/8/1914 9(6), Dom 24/8/1914 2(5)

<sup>31</sup> AAAB 482/24k Eder, L., AAAB 478/2aq Eder, L., AAAB 482/1d Eder, M., AAAB 482/1e Eder, O. (NA)

<sup>32</sup> Circular No. 210 by Jos P. Frengley, Dept. of Public Health, Hospitals & Charitable Aid, 2/10/1914. AAAB 478/8bc, Prisoners of War, re arrest of (NA)

<sup>33</sup> Mrs Nickel to Major Matheson (undated, about Jan. 1916), Sgt.-Major B.J. Morton to Adjutant General, 19/1/1915 (s/be 1916), Adjutant General to Commandant, Somes Island, 20/1/1916, Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 22/1/1916, Horace Baker Ltd. to Sgt. Major Morton, 5/4/1916 and others. AAAB 482/24e Nickel, C. (NA)

<sup>34</sup> Sgt.-Major B.J. Morton to Headquarters, New Zealand Military Forces, 17/5/1916, including Report by Sgt.-Major B.J. Morton on the Destitute Case of Mrs Nickel, wife of P/War Nickel, (cMay 1916). AAAB 482/24e (NA)

<sup>35</sup> Personal Interview 30/1/1997, with Ann Sheeran, Levin, daughter of Elizabeth Nickel by her second marriage to W.H. Hargreaves.

<sup>36</sup> Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 8/10/1914, including undated, unsourced newspaper clipping. W. Knab to Inspector of Police, 24/11/1914. Police Report of Constable F.A. Wilson, Phillipstown Police Station, 20/4/1919. AAAB 482/38h, Knab, W. (NA)

<sup>37</sup> Eberhard Focke to Major Matheson, 2/1/1917. Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 10/1/1917. Major J. Osburne-Lilly, for Adjutant General, 7/2/1917. AD 1 42/66, Visitors to POW camps (NA)



**(Above)** Somes Island, probably photographed from the hills above Petone. The tiny Mokopuna (then Leper) Island in the foreground, blends in with its neighbour. The two bays immediately left of centre probably include Kulture Bay where internees were beaten. The beach the internees used is obscure at the extreme right of the photo, while trees mostly obscure the camp on the hilltop at the centre. The wharf is on the left. The new road the internees built is perhaps included in the light patch above Mokopuna Island. (Photo: *Auckland Weekly News*, 20/4/1916, p. 40)

**(Below)** A procession of prisoners, complete with drum, accordion and violin (compliments of the Bavarian String Band) and German flag, march around the island in the course of some unknown celebration. Almost certainly the path they are using is one of those they were forced to build, and which they were regularly forced to march on as exercise. Some sections of this path, which circumnavigated the island, are still intact. Earthworks associated with the construction of the World War Two anti-aircraft gun emplacements covered part of the original track, however, it has since been rebuilt. (Photo: F-75448-1/2, Alexander Turnbull Library)



## IV

**Human Zoo**

According to Stan Rogers' 1914-15 memoirs, the Eastbourne ferry *Cobar* initially served the island. While this allowed the internees to receive visitors, they evidently soon became a local tourist attraction. Rogers wrote that: "before we knew what was happening we were giving harbour rides for the rubber necks of Wellington, and that was every day of the week." He evidently attempted to get Matheson to stop this, but Matheson, "school-boy minded like", considered that they were entitled to see their friends<sup>1</sup>.

A strained relationship between Matheson and Rogers developed quickly. For example, Rogers complained to the Adjutant General about the prisoners receiving newspapers, as well as "quite big parcels, books and cakes, etc." He thought female visitors were taking them to the island in their bloomers<sup>2</sup>. Matheson allegedly reminded Rogers that loading the boat was his responsibility, so he should stop the "rubber necks" and permit only the prisoners' friends to visit. Rogers wrote:

This suited me, so I cut out the *Cobar* and got a big launch, and when loaded with the prisoners' rations, etc., and stores, the lady visitors had to sit on a side of beef, there was no room for walking around.

Thereafter the Commandant issued passes at his discretion<sup>3</sup>.

Rogers' anti-smuggling strategies included forcing would-be visitors to board the smaller boat by climbing down a ship's ladder from the wharf. He recorded: "some middle-aged and elderly women would not go down, and they could only come to my office and complain, but the younger women did." Rogers personally helped them down the ladder and if he felt a bulge when he grabbed their knees, a policeman helped them back up the ladder. A "woman police" then helped them into a car. Some other women just walked off. The smuggling:

Soon stopped, as the names were mentioned in the (*Evening*) *Post* as smugglers. They were fined the small sum of £1 and costs, but it was the names that counted, and the Major went crook at me for doing such a dirty thing - still that school-boy trend of thought.

Next the internees' mail increased dramatically, including "cakes and parcels galore". The guards examined the parcels, but cakes measuring 12 inches or more in width passed straight through until one dropped and fell apart. Out fell a bunch of paper and letters. After that the guards cut all cakes in half, although many left the office somewhat narrower than they arrived, and any with letters inside were "dealt with". Rogers added:

The boys got quite clever at cutting the shaping - they could make it any size when put together. Of course the prisoners were told that all cakes had to be cut because some had letters inside<sup>4</sup>.

Despite a guard of only 30 young territorials, Matheson did not sense any serious desire among internees to escape. He thought some might consider that option once their chance of parole evaporated. When Matheson personally tested the Guard under various conditions - and found he could pass them undetected after dark - he decided it needed strengthening to at least 45 men. Due to his long-standing interest in military training<sup>5</sup>, and as a way to strengthen the Guard, Matheson offered to train NZEF recruits on *Somes*. He considered that men supplied in the past were "quite unfit for the field" where guard duties, outpost and skirmishing duties, and musketry were concerned. Matheson and his subaltern, Lieutenant Pirani, were accomplished in these skills, and Matheson considered *Somes* ideal for training purposes. He asked though that such trainees spend at least three weeks on the island<sup>6</sup>. Colonel Chaytor also liked this idea and set the wheels in motion<sup>7</sup>. Probably it also established the situation that obliged Judge Chapman to ignore evidence of ill-treatment in 1918, as few early guards were still available for Chapman to cross-examine.

Barely a month into the war, the young student guards received instructions to return to their studies. None wished to leave, in part because they felt they could no longer pass their exams. Matheson duly told the authorities of this predicament<sup>8</sup>. Chaytor, when contacting the Education Department, added that the students sought the same privileges received by their counterparts who had gone to Samoa<sup>9</sup>. The Department regarded that group's existing year's work as sufficient to achieve automatic passes<sup>10</sup>.

Other problems occurred due to the inexperience of the Guard. For example, knowledge in September 1914 that an increasing number of internees were regarded by the police as

“dangerous and undesirable”, created nervousness amongst the Guard. Matheson had, therefore, found it:

Necessary to submit every member of the guard to a severe drill with ball cartridge. Accidental discharge of fire arms is almost a daily occurrence and it is only by the most careful attention to musketry that these accidents are confined to the rifle range<sup>11</sup>.

Illustrating Matheson’s point was an incident in November 1915, when a recruit, Private H. West, accidentally shot himself in the thumb while handling a loaded rifle<sup>12</sup>. Indicative of the frustration doubtless felt by Matheson throughout the war, he unsuccessfully used this combined argument to justify claiming a pay rate equivalent to someone on active service, with the support of Colonel Chaytor. However, his genuine claim to working practically under active service conditions - at least in the early days of the war - was denied as it meant proportionally increasing the pay of all other officers, NCOs and men involved with the camp<sup>13</sup>.

Naturally the newly created “enemy aliens” saw their job-security vanish and many arrived on Somes described as “destitute”. Some shipping companies refused to employ wharf labourers of German, Austro-Hungarian or Turkish birth, whether naturalised or not. This upset the Wharf Labourers’ Union, which circulated a petition asking the Minister of Internal Affairs why casual labourers of these origins were dismissed, while foremen of the same extraction remained<sup>14</sup>. In contrast to other attempts to ostracise “enemy aliens”, on 30 August the Waterside Workers’ Band presented a musical programme for the internees on Somes. The Defence Department made a steamer available to the band and also allowed the internees’ relatives to attend<sup>15</sup>.

The New Zealand union’s attitude contrasted to that of its Australian counterparts. Early December saw the Melbourne Wharf Labourers’ Union’s stance cost around 30 Germans and Austrians their jobs. The Sydney Wharf Labourers’ Union also refused to work with “enemy aliens”, whether naturalised or not. The Union considered that the reduced work available due to the war, should be retained for British and Australian workers<sup>16</sup>. In March 1915, Australia’s Defence Department announced that it would follow Britain’s lead and intern unemployed naturalised Germans and also grant them 10/- per week as destitution money<sup>17</sup>.

New Zealand's unemployable "enemy aliens" were increasingly left struggling. One who lost his job on Wellington's wharves was twenty-year-old Arthur Rottmann, a crewman from the *Hinemoa*. While the captain wished to retain him and the police did not object, the Marine Department disagreed. Rottmann wanted to go to *Somes*. However, in early September the Labour Department instead sent him to work on a farm near Mangaweka. There they thought he would be out of harm's way. Rottmann's family had a history of mental problems and on 28 December 1914, following a drinking session, his mind allegedly snapped. He claimed to have regained his senses only to discover that he had apparently killed the couple he worked for and their baby. By the time of his capture, the sensational murder was national headlines, while the resulting trial became Wanganui's entertainment of the week. Coincidentally, Judge Chapman who later conducted the Royal Commission on *Somes*, also presided over this case. Hung barely two months after the murders, Rottmann's last remarks included the comment: "If this war had never taken place I would still be a free man"<sup>18</sup>. On New Year's Eve 1914, perhaps influenced by the publicity surrounding the murders, an angry crowd reportedly of around 2,000, attacked and smashed a German-owned business in Gisborne<sup>19</sup>.

Other "enemy aliens", such as an experienced fireman with the Wellington Fire Brigade, who had been naturalised in Tasmania, were dismissed in favour of British employees. Five weeks later the Fire Brigade reinstated that man, named Cook, but at a much lower grading.<sup>20</sup> *The Dominion* of 7 September 1914 recorded that at the time, some 37 unnaturalised Germans were reporting daily to Wellington's police headquarters<sup>21</sup>.

While records of men successfully paroled do not apparently survive, some show up as reinternments. For example, Franz (Frank) Kellermann, a baker, was paroled on 30 August 1914 after his employer and the General Secretary of the Bakers' Union vouched for him. By October 1915, when he broke parole by visiting Wellington without police permission, he lived in Upper Hutt. When he was again paroled in mid-1917, the two men who vouched for him were obliged to pay a bond of £100<sup>22</sup>. Also paroled, on 7 November 1914, was the aforementioned Conrad Nickel, who became the internees' cook on *Somes*. During one of his fortnightly visits home, he made the mistake of

making pro-German remarks at a hotel. Thus in January 1916 he moved permanently to Somes<sup>23</sup>. Nickel was repatriated to Germany in 1919, minus his by then estranged family. Robert Laue who, having been paroled on 17 September 1914, was rearrested in Auckland three weeks later for failing to notify his changed address. He was also repatriated in 1919<sup>24</sup>.

As ships arrived in New Zealand ports, German crew members found themselves with one-way tickets to Somes. For example, the *Pakeha's* crew included six Germans and an Austrian when it arrived in Auckland from London in late September. However, the British crew refused to work it while these men remained aboard and as a result the British crew were arrested for disobeying orders. The Captain soon dropped the charges but the result was that the Germans and Austrian relocated to Somes<sup>25</sup>. A similar fate befell four Germans from the barque *Irene*, when it arrived in Bluff in mid-December<sup>26</sup>.

In addition to New Zealand's "enemy aliens", the surrender of German (now Western) Samoa on 30 August, led to the arrival on Somes on 28 September, of ten "German Samoan" men, two accompanied by their wives<sup>27</sup>. Another nineteen arrived on 13 October, including the wife of one of the earlier internees<sup>28</sup>. These men included the island's administration staff, whose social status was rather different to that of the average Somes internee. Lieutenant Rogers' memoirs record a chaotic shopping spree at Wellington's D.I.C. department store, as the newly arrived "Samoans" and their wives replaced light-weight clothing with high quality clothing such as furs, suits and top coats (at the New Zealand Government's expense). Contrary to Rogers' belief, though, Dr. Schultz, the former Governor of Samoa - and two others - remained in Auckland prior to moving to the newly established internment camp on Motuihi Island<sup>29</sup>.

While most of the "Samoan Germans" transferred to Motuihi on 22 October and 9 November 1914<sup>30</sup>, a few later arrivals stayed on Somes. Twelve were there in late 1917, prior to the arrival of von Luckner's four crewmen<sup>31</sup>. The New Zealand authorities considered that, in addition to status, the "Samoans" were less suited to Somes' climate, although clearly both groups survived German winters.

News of overseas civilian internments regularly reached New Zealand. Britain's Alien Restriction Act, passed in early August, resulted in many internments, although the German ambassador left without problem<sup>32</sup>. By mid-September, Britain had 50,632 Germans and 16,141 Austro-Hungarians registered as "enemy aliens"<sup>33</sup>. The *Evening Post* recorded that in the first two months of war, almost 300 British-based Germans changed their surnames<sup>34</sup>. The *Evening Post's* readers also learned that Australia's 1911 Census found 32,990 German-born people, thus easily overshadowing New Zealand's German population<sup>35</sup>. During August, 1,571 foreign residents rushed to become naturalised Australians, a far cry from the usual average of 190 per month<sup>36</sup>. The South African authorities ordered Germans living near ports to surrender their arms and ammunition, while De Beers' diamond mine also closed<sup>37</sup>. During October, the South African authorities ordered the internment of all Germans, whether naturalised or not, at the Johannesburg showgrounds<sup>38</sup>.

Fed a constant diet of often exaggerated and sometimes false newspaper reports on German activities, the British people quickly became paranoid about German spies and saboteurs<sup>39</sup>. This irrational fear - given New Zealand's distance from Germany - also embedded itself into the New Zealand mindset. In October, the British Home Office ordered the internment of "all" Germans and Austro-Hungarians in Britain between the ages of 17 and 45 years. Two hundred were arrested in London and hundreds more in Manchester, the *Evening Post* claimed<sup>40</sup>.

In October, *The Dominion* interviewed Wellington Jeweller, Mr M. Carr, and learned of his eleven-day captivity in Germany, following his arrest on 5 August. Carr described his guards and their fixed bayonets. He also described being jeered at by the local people, the poor food and sanitation, and being locked up with many others in a shed, in their case a butcher's shed complete with meat hooks. Luckily for him, the American Ambassador secured his freedom.

Carr claimed that "no-one knows what it is to be free until they have been captive." He had learned to obey orders quickly and never question anything. Never again would he cage a canary or chain a dog, he claimed. However, his "blood boiled" after reaching

London and “seeing” how well Britain treated its German internees. Held in “that magnificent place Olympia”, these internees (numbering 1,500 by December 1914<sup>41</sup>) supposedly had - for free - ham and eggs for breakfast, and all the delicacies of the season. Meanwhile, the ladies of London reportedly solicited subscriptions to keep them in cigarettes and literature.<sup>42</sup> No doubt the men on *Somes* paid for Carr’s mere eleven days, as their sources of help gradually dried up.

Throughout the war, conditions in the various military prisoner of war camps and Ruhleben Internment Camp for civilians, near Berlin, featured in local newspapers. J. Davidson Ketchum, a social scientist who later wrote *Ruhleben: A Prison Camp Society*, was amongst those arrested when war erupted. Released on parole pending repatriated, his four-year internment began several weeks later. On 9 September 1914, he and about two hundred others, including forty British, were transferred from the Berlin jail to stables at Ruhleben racecourse. Germany’s mass internment of British male civilians began on 6 November and, as a result, over four thousand British men spent four years interned at Ruhleben<sup>43</sup>.

Ironically, Germany’s November internments were a retaliation for Britain’s aforementioned alleged large-scale internments in October. Ketchum said the latter were in fact improvised camps for penniless, unemployed Germans. Still, on 31 October Germany gave Britain until 5 November to release them. When Britain ignored this ultimatum, Germany arrested every male British subject aged between 17 and 55 on its territory. The next phase in the tit-for-tat internments occurred on 13 May, immediately after the *Lusitania* sinking. This resulted in Britain interning some 20,000 “enemy aliens” for the duration<sup>44</sup>.

Based on the dates of capture of almost 200 internees it seems unlikely that New Zealand’s flow of internments increased in October 1914. Rather it seems more likely that most who were vulnerable were interned in August 1914, while others steadily drifted in thereafter.

About a dozen New Zealanders spent the war penned up in Ruhleben<sup>45</sup>. Food and conditions were poor, while their captors did not provide any work, recreation or social structure. Instead these internees were generally left to their own resources, apart from hours whiled away in meal queues. Even the guards, some of whom were unpleasant, departed in September 1915. Without these impositions, a distinct male society soon developed. This resulted in internal organisation, a significant level of autonomy, entertainment, newspapers and other social activities that never developed - or were actively prevented from developing - in the comparatively small autocratically-run camp on Somes Island<sup>46</sup>. Interestingly, it was the German Commandant who suggested handing the camp's internal control over to the prisoners. He considered his 250 guards more trouble than the 4,000 British prisoners<sup>47</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Stan Rogers to Harold, 28/10/1914. MS-Papers-5553-1 (WTU)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Major General A.W. Robin to 'To Whom it may Concern', 18/9/1919. No. 7117, Matheson (Personnel Archive, NZDF)

<sup>6</sup> Major Matheson to Adjutant General, (received 29/8/1914), AD 1 15/161 (NA)

<sup>7</sup> Col. E.W.C. Chaytor, Adjutant General, to District H.Q., Palmerston North, 2/9/1914, AD 1 15/161. (NA)

<sup>8</sup> Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 13/9/1914. AD 1 15/161 (NA)

<sup>9</sup> Colonel Chaytor to Secretary for Education, 21/9/1914. AD 1 15/161 (NA)

<sup>10</sup> Corporal W.D. John to Major Matheson, 15/9/1914. AD 1 15/161 (NA)

<sup>11</sup> Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 3/9/1914. No. 7118, Matheson (Personnel Archive, NZDF)

<sup>12</sup> EP 13/11/1915 4(9)

<sup>13</sup> Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 3/9/1914. Col. G.W.C. Chaytor to Q.M.G.1, 4/9/1914, endorsed (illegible), 8/9/1914. No. 7118, Matheson (Personnel Archive, NZDF)

<sup>14</sup> EP 3/12/1914 8(3)

<sup>15</sup> EP 29/8/1914 6(9)

<sup>16</sup> EP 8/12/1914 7(8) & 8(2)

<sup>17</sup> EP 19/3/1915 7(6)

<sup>18</sup> EP 6/1/1915 3(7-8), 8/3/1915 8(4). WC 12/2/1915 4(5) & 7(2-4), 13/2/1915 4(5) & 5(4-7), 15/2/1915 4(5) & 5(6-7).

<sup>19</sup> EP 2/1/1915 3(9) & 8(6), 6/1/1915 3(4)

<sup>20</sup> Dom 18/9/1914 4(6)

<sup>21</sup> Dom 7/9/1914 4(7)

<sup>22</sup> AAAB 482/44t Kellermann, F. (NA)

<sup>23</sup> AAAB 482/24e (NA)

<sup>24</sup> AAAB 482/42a Laue, R. (NA)

<sup>25</sup> EP 26/9/1914 4(3)

<sup>26</sup> EP 15/12/1914 2(7)

<sup>27</sup> EP 28/9/1914 8(5)

<sup>28</sup> EP 13/10/1914 8(4)

<sup>29</sup> Stan Rogers to Harold, 18/12/1914. MS-Papers-5553-1 (WTU)

<sup>30</sup> EP 21/10/1914 8(3) refers to Schultz already being on the island, EP 22/10/1914 8(5), says 9 people including two wives left Somes for Auckland. EP 9/11/1914 2(5). The article says 20 prisoners were transferred, but does not mention any wives. EP 7/12/1914 2(7) Eight more Germans arrive bound for prison for various reasons.

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- <sup>31</sup> *Register of Aliens*, 1917, pp. 683-691.
- <sup>32</sup> EP 13/8/1914 7(8), 19/9/1914 4(2-3), 26/9/1914 6(9)
- <sup>33</sup> EP 27/10/1914 3(3)
- <sup>34</sup> EP 18/11/1914 6(8)
- <sup>35</sup> EP 11/8/1914 8(1-2). Also *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia*, 1911 - Birthplaces. pp. 116.
- <sup>36</sup> EP 9/9/1914 3(4-5) & 6(7)
- <sup>37</sup> EP 13/8/1914 7(8)
- <sup>38</sup> Dom 20/10/1914 4(7)
- <sup>39</sup> e.g. EP 30/9/1914 7(6)
- <sup>40</sup> EP 23/10/1914 7(8-9)
- <sup>41</sup> EP 23/12/1914 6(8)
- <sup>42</sup> Dom 14/10/1914 6(5)
- <sup>43</sup> Ketchum, pp. xvi-xvii
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xviii, 5-7.
- <sup>45</sup> EP 9/2/1915 8(1) & 6/12/1916 7(8) [re: H.G. Hunt], 21/5/1915 7(8), 13/7/1915 7(7), 27/12/1916 8(9) [re: C.J. King], 28/10/1916 5(5).
- <sup>46</sup> Ketchum, pp. 1, 99-103, 190, 192-209.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* p. 190.



Captioned "To the Memory of War Captivity, Somes Island, New Zealand, 1914-1915", this postcard was drawn by Austrian entertainer and artist, Rinaldo (real name: Joseph Anton Zahn). It shows internees performing the detested water-carrying duty between the wharf and the camp. The steep road shown is the Bullock Track, so-named after the original motive-power used to transport goods to the camp. The internees subsequently built the present "main" road. The Maori decorations around the border make an interesting contrast with the purpose of the camp, but are probably also indicative of Rinaldo's skill as a tattooist. The Hart family, which owns the original postcard, ran the Somes Island lighthouse during the war. (Photo: F-112242-1/2, R. Hart Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library)

## Protest and Confrontation

With both internees and guards obliged to adapt to highly unusual living conditions, it is reasonable to expect a significant degree of culture shock as each side adjusted to its new status. As one Canadian internment camp guard later commented, among those he guarded, there were few upon whom the effects of the long years of captivity did not leave their mark. He felt that "confinement in a strange land, inactivity and hopeless waiting were in themselves enough to shatter the nerves and undermine the health"<sup>1</sup>.

Understandably, the Somes Island camp's first weeks were difficult. For example, most internees were young, although they were probably older and certainly more worldly than the first guards. In addition, the circumstances hardly encouraged friendly relations. Some were clearly genuine trouble-makers, both before and during internment. Yet we must view even their complaints more open-mindedly now. For instance, some internees risked their lives in an attempt to convince the outside world that problems existed on the island.

The first internees included hard-living, well-travelled seamen and labourers. They were not of a class likely to bow meekly to sudden and infinite loss of freedom. Doubtless all internees felt - if not always openly - considerable anger at their situation. For example, a remark on Edward Wohlfarth's file, dated 1 September 1914, recorded that the 28-year-old brewer was apparently intelligent, but appeared hostile. He was amongst those reprimanded for neglect of duty<sup>2</sup>. Meanwhile Frederick Allmeritter's file reveals that on 2 September, the 21-year-old Wellington barman was "under strong suspicion of breach of regulations"<sup>3</sup>.

The greatest initial source of agitation - and the camp's first breach of the Hague Convention, which dealt with the care of prisoners of war - was the requirement that internees carry the camp's water supply up the steep hill from the wharf. At first a bullock and sledge performed this duty. However, when the bullock's hooves wore badly, the internees took its place<sup>4</sup>. On 9 September Matheson complained of a water

shortage caused by toilets within the buildings, old leaky spouting and tanks, unnecessary water taps, “phenomenally fine weather” and “indifference on (the) part of prisoners in regard to economy”<sup>5</sup>. Clearly making the internees carry the water, with yoke and buckets, would promote conservation. Unfortunately, failing to also pay them for this work initiated years of trouble.

On 16 September the District Health Officer and the Port Medical Officer inspected the camp’s sanitary arrangements. It then housed 112 internees and 50 guards. They found that waste water could pollute the camp’s drinking water, while “excessive handling” of water delivered by boat and internee labour, was another problem. They recommended pumping the water directly from the boats to the camp’s tanks, and suggested, amongst many other things, replacing the internal toilets with outdoor latrines. Other recommendations included obtaining fire extinguishers (there being “absolutely no provision made in regard to fire”), fitting gauze to pantry windows, airing bedding daily, leaving cubicle (bedroom) windows open permanently - with gauze to prevent draughts if necessary - and moving the unfortunate guards from their rotting dormitory, to tents<sup>6</sup>.

Meanwhile, back on the mainland the populace thought the internees spent their days fishing, relaxing and generally enjoying life. The *Evening Post* reported on 21 September that a few original internees had been paroled, while others had arrived. “Affairs at the camp go on smoothly,” the newspaper remarked, “no complaints as to treatment being forthcoming. The men are found partial employment by fatigue duty.” Despite this air of tranquillity, what appears to have been the camp’s first serious disturbance evidently occurred the same day.

On Monday, 21 September, some internees refused to carry the camp’s water supply up from the wharf some 200 feet below. Edwin Wolke, one of over 100 men lined up by Matheson that day as a result, later recorded that most internees were required to carry water. On this occasion, they refused. It was “very heavy work to carry two tins of water up the steep hill and we had received only bread and tea for our rations for about 3 days, with no other food.”

Matheson allegedly assembled the internees in the courtyard and ordered those refusing to carry water, evidently some 21 men, to go into a certain room. Once there, he locked the door, returning a short time later with a revolver. Pointing the revolver in the face of each internee in turn, Matheson demanded to know if the men would carry water. All refused. Allegedly Matheson then ordered the alarm sounded, lined the guards up in the courtyard and had the errant internees line up in front of them. Matheson told the guards to load their rifles and shoot anyone who moved. The guards then marched the internees to the camp prison. Matheson, revolver in hand, marched in front.

After locking up the internees for an hour, Matheson returned, repeated his demands and his use of the revolver. Again all refused. At about 12:30 (pm ?) he offered them a good meal in exchange for ending the strike. The internees agreed to carry the water, "after we had received the good meal." A plentiful supply of meat then appeared, despite the internees having done without for three days<sup>7</sup>. Wolke's personal file - along with those of other internees - records that on Tuesday, 22 September 1914, they received five hours close detention for refusing to carry water<sup>8</sup>. For some men, this became the only entry on their conduct sheet. For others, though, it was the first of many.

By 24 September the camp, which then used about 300[sic] gallons of water each day<sup>9</sup>, relied on water delivered at considerable cost by the *SS Karaka*. The District Engineer suggested using the Defence Department's vessel, the *SS Janie Seddon* instead of the *Karaka*, and as a result, the *Janie Seddon* (which had a 600 gallon water tank as at 1924<sup>10</sup>) became a regular visitor to Somes.

The House of Representatives learned of the water-carrying problem on 23 October. A guard named McNiven - probably an aforementioned university student of that name<sup>11</sup> - had informed Mr Wilford, Member for the Hutt, that on his first day on Somes the internees carried the water. However, the guards carried it by the time he went on leave 14 days earlier. The internees, Wilford demanded, should carry their own water or go without.

Prime Minister Massey, who had just learned of the problem, replied that the internees were Imperial prisoners. Thus Imperial instructions guided New Zealand's actions. Although Massey visited Somea a fortnight earlier at the request of the Imperial authorities, no-one mentioned the problem to him. He knew, though, that an international arrangement (the Hague Convention) required that captors pay prisoners of war who worked. Awareness of this, he rightly believed, caused the strike. Even so, he agreed that the internees should carry their own water<sup>12</sup>. Thus, the breach of international law moved from being Matheson's misunderstanding to a symbol of the New Zealand Government's indifference.

On 21 October, Matheson told his superiors that he had dealt with most matters raised by the Health Inspection. The guards now shivered unhappily in tents in a paddock adjoining the camp, albeit that their former dormitory now accommodated 31 German Samoans, who were destined to move to Motuihi Island. Due to the inexpensive nature of internee labour, a Public Works Department proposal to install a windmill at the wharf to pump the water up to the camp, did not happen<sup>13</sup>.

Ongoing tension in the camp resulted in charges against Gustav Gayen, aged 27, the well-to-do son of a Hamburg shipping agent. Considered pro-German and a commercial spy, Gayen was charged with using language to prejudice good order and discipline on 21 November. Gayen, who blamed his outburst on his hot-blooded Spanish mother, was severely reprimanded<sup>14</sup>. Bernard Heyen, aged 24 and formerly a steward on the *Tahiti*, along with Heinrich Petersen, a 42-year-old fireman from the *Remuera*, received two charges each on 16 December for failing to remove their slops. The first charge earned them three hours on firewood duty at the kitchen. Their refusal saw them receive three days in close detention. Conrad Kirdorf, a 20-year-old gas and motor engineer, and Michael Eder, a 25-year-old flaxmill worker, were more obliging. They completed their three-hour sentences received the same day for the same original charge<sup>15</sup>.

Still, tension on Somea at this time was tame compared with some overseas camps. For example, internees revolted at Robert's Heights, Cape Town, in September 1914<sup>16</sup>. Then in November 1914, German officers and civilians rioted in the Douglas Detention Camp

on the Isle of Man, causing the guards to turn their guns on the prisoners. Five died and fifteen were wounded during this “justifiable homicide”<sup>17</sup>. A few weeks later, a visiting American official declared the camp’s conditions and food satisfactory, and that the riot was the work of agitators. Prisoners recognised that they only had themselves to blame, he said<sup>18</sup>.

In October 1914, local newspapers reported that Britain did not compel its civilian internees to work. Those choosing to work received the “usual wages,”<sup>19</sup> in accordance with the Hague Convention. In late October, readers also learned that New Zealand’s internees undertook fatigue duty and kept their quarters tidy. The *Evening Post* added:

In accordance with the stricter (Imperial Government) regulations recently enforced, they are now being deprived of their regular supply of daily newspapers<sup>20</sup>.

For prisoners, therefore, news from outside became merely snippets obtained from visitors, newly interned men and guards. In any case, whatever news was available took Britain’s perspective.

What began with the water-carrying strike in September 1914, “climaxed”, in the words of one internee on 16 August 1916, with a furious haranguing of the Squad leaders by Matheson, on the extent of his hatred of all things German<sup>21</sup>. Clearly, for this former school teacher, the situation deteriorated markedly during this time.

Although Justice Chapman felt unable to fully accept the accuracy of many internee statements during the Royal Commission, clearly complainants could gain little by blatant lying. In fact, they considered that they risked retribution from Matheson and the guards. Much of their evidence targeted ill-treatment and neglect by their captors. At the same time it strongly suggests that they trusted Chapman, who spoke German and indeed gained an American-born, ethnically-German son-in-law in 1915<sup>22</sup>. Despite their predicament, it is clear also that many prisoners retained far greater faith in the New Zealand Government than they did in their gaolers.

By early January 1915, Matheson’s outlook was far from that of a kindly school teacher. Resentful internees did not respond to stern looks and firm words as the children of

Linton and Stanway Schools once did. On 11 January 1915, the refusal of five internees to clean rubbish from around the camp, caused Matheson to seek out punishments in the *King's Regulations* that an Internment Camp Commandant might allocate. He then notified his superiors accordingly<sup>23</sup>. Once again, therefore, Matheson was left to his own devices albeit, as Chapman later remarked, that he had no military experience<sup>24</sup>. In fact, his main experience with military discipline was gained while barking orders at adolescent school boys in his capacity as officer commanding the Wellington College Cadets<sup>25</sup>.

As a result, the five men received three days close detention and a period of No. 2 Diet (bread and water), served at Alexandra Barracks, Wellington, due to inadequate detention facilities on Somes. Four, being first offenders received four days on No. 2 Diet, however, the fifth, Frederick Allmeritter, received 11 days on No. 2 Diet<sup>26</sup>.

On 4 February, Austrian, Paul Haller, stole a newspaper from the office table for William Knab, earning both men three days close detention and 18 days No. 2 Diet. At that time, Matheson described the former, Paul Haller, as "well-behaved", but "overcome with a desire for news"<sup>27</sup>. By July, however, Matheson considered that until Haller had been suppressed, he:

Was the oracle and fluent scribe of the lowest class of prisoner .... When newspapers were forbidden he was the fox of the Camp, and was known to have been in the habit of watching the Commandant's movements.

Twice he was caught sneaking into the guards' quarters. Robert Hall, an internee noted by his compatriots as a "friend" to Matheson, considered Haller capable of lying with a look of feigned innocence<sup>28</sup>. Doubtless to Haller's great relief, from early April 1915 internees could again receive newspapers, with the *Evening Post* becoming Somes' officially sanctioned newspaper<sup>29</sup>.

Although not directly ascribed any blame, one obvious trigger to the increased agitation on the island in early 1915 was the first internee death (of seven or eight<sup>30</sup>) associated with the island. William Landgraf, aged about 40, died from heart disease on 20 February 1915, moments after returning to his room from water-carrying duty<sup>31</sup>. Interestingly, Carlo Aleason, who died from heart and lung problems in Wellington Hospital on 14

June 1915, does not apparently feature on Somes' official body count. He never actually made it to the island and the authorities "released" him three days before his death<sup>32</sup>.

Well over 100 statements by internees provide a picture of life at the camp between August 1914 and early 1918<sup>33</sup>. They reveal that in February or early March 1915, Matheson ordered the internees to do manual work, yet again for no pay. In particular, he wanted gravel carried from the beach for roading purposes. Philipp Baer, a ship's steward, wrote that Matheson said that as civilian internees "we were not supposed to do any work. Everybody as a matter of course refused to do any work unless we all should get paid for the same." Baer considered that many would have volunteered to work for payment, as they had no other means to pay for tobacco or to supplement their rations. He later learned that it was the New Zealand Government that refused to pay them. He wished they had known this from the start, "but instead of this a lot of petty punishment set in, and from this it went to worse, to bodily ill-treatment<sup>34</sup>."

On 11 March, William Hinkelmann's punishment for swimming too near the wharf when the steamer was in - without wearing a regulation costume - was to carry buckets of gravel<sup>35</sup>. For the same violation of regulations and for refusing the same punishment (because he contested the distance from the steamer), William Pahlicke received three days close detention and 18 days No. 2 Diet<sup>36</sup>. On the same date, Walter Volkmer - a noted dodger but the best leap-frogger in camp - received five hours close detention for refusing light fatigue work. Two days later he received 21 days of No. 2 Diet for the same charge<sup>37</sup>.

On Friday, 19 March 1915, at the height of the troubles - and probably a significant cause of them - the American Consul General J.I. Brittain became the first neutral consul to visit Somes<sup>38</sup>. Both Bernard Heyen and Conrad Kirdorf mentioned this visit and the related incident. On 13 March, Heyen, a squad-leader, wrote in his diary that he had refused to scrub the squad's room. As a result, and because he was unaware that this was deliberate disobedience, Matheson penalised the whole squad for neglect. At about the same time Heyen also wrote: "There will be serious trouble tomorrow. Made all

arrangements". When challenged by Matheson in March 1916 about these remarks, Heyen said he had arranged his affairs in case he was shot<sup>39</sup>.

In fact, Heyen and others from Squadrooms 1 to 4 hoped to show the Consul the conditions in their squadrooms. They disliked having mud tramped through several squadrooms by internees entering the building. To highlight the fact that only one external door was available (of several), they left their floors unscrubbed. The day before Brittain's visit Matheson told the the internees at Roll Call not to think they could bring all their complaints to the Consul. Six internees, including Heyen, later wrote that Matheson had warned them that the Consul could do little. He said the Stars and Stripes did not "blow" over New Zealand and that the American Consul could "look just as well after a dollar as any other American"<sup>40</sup>. As a precaution, though, the guards arrested members of two of the offending squads just before Brittain arrived and held them in a paddock. Matheson told these "loafers" that they could have some fresh air and that the guards would shoot anyone who came too near the fence<sup>41</sup>. Although released once the Consul departed, their chance to state their grievances had also gone.

<sup>1</sup> Thompson, p. 8

<sup>2</sup> AAAB 482/27j Wohlfarth, E. (NA)

<sup>3</sup> AAAB 482/32f Allmeritter, F. (NA)

<sup>4</sup> EP 8/4/1916 9(1-2)

<sup>5</sup> Major Matheson to Adjutant-General, 9/9/1914. AD 1 12/84, Water Supply, Somes Island. (NA)

<sup>6</sup> Sydney Smith, District Health Officer, to Officer in Charge, Somes Island Internment Camp, 22/9/1914. AD 1 12/84. (NA)

<sup>7</sup> Edwin Wolke to Justice Chapman, 1918, Micro MS-18. (WTU)

<sup>8</sup> AAAB 482/27f, Wolke, Charles (Should be Wolke, Edwin). Others included: AAAB 482/32e Arnold, P., AAAB 482/32g Otting, W., AAAB 482/39b Kabierski, P., AAAB 482/39c Krausch, W., AAAB 482/39d, Kock, M., AAAB 482/70c, Nestmann, M., AAAB 482/70b, Neumann, O., AAAB 482/70i, Reuter, C., AAAB 482.27b, Topfer, M., AAAB 482/2b, Heidel, A., AAAB 482/49k, Manthei, W., AAAB 482/50c, Haller, P., AAAB 482/41f Johansen, G., AAAB 482/41e Ibelheusser, A., AAAB 482/42d, Montwell, O., AAAB 482/42g, Pahlicke, W., AAAB 482/37b, Schumacher, F., and no doubt others. (NA)

<sup>9</sup> J.D. Louch, District Engineer, to Under-Secretary, Public Works Dept., 24/9/1914. AD 1 12/84 (NA)

<sup>10</sup> Quartermaster General H. Pilkington to District Engineer, 7/11/1924. AD 1 12/84 (NA)

<sup>11</sup> Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 13/9/1914. AD 15/161, Guards, Somes Island (NA)

<sup>12</sup> *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates* (NZPD) Vol. 171, 1914. pp. 310-1

<sup>13</sup> Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 21/10/1914. AD 1 12/84. (NA)

<sup>14</sup> AAAB 482/32m Gayen, G., AAAB 482/42e Never, A. (NA)

<sup>15</sup> AAAB 482/1h Kerdorf, C., AAAB 482/1d, Eder, M. (NA)

<sup>16</sup> EP 28/9/1914 8(1)

<sup>17</sup> EP 28/11/1914 6(6), 30/11/1914 7(9)

<sup>18</sup> EP 31/12/1914 7(7)

<sup>19</sup> EP 26/11/1914 7(6)

<sup>20</sup> EP 29/10/1914 8(4). Also Dom 28/10/1914 6(3), and Lt. Col. Gibbon to Postmaster-General, 24/10/1914, AD 1 51/324 Literature for POWs.

- <sup>21</sup> Philipp Baer to Justice Chapman, undated - 1918. Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>22</sup> ES 13/10/1915 'Personal', records the marriage of his daughter Vera to Sigfried Eichelbaum, son of Mr and Mrs Max Eichelbaum. The 1917 *Register of Aliens* (No. 528/10 & 528/11) advises that Sigfried was a chief clerk in Wellington, while his father was a business manager.
- <sup>23</sup> Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 15/1/1915, AAAB 482/49d Borck, K. (NA)
- <sup>24</sup> *AJHR*, 1919, H-33. p. 13.
- <sup>25</sup> Major General A.W. Robin to "To Whom it may Concern", 18/9/1919. No/ 7118, Matheson. (Personnel Archive, NZDF)
- <sup>26</sup> Major Matheson to Adjutant-General, 12/1/1915, AAAB 482/32f Allmeritter, F. (NA)
- <sup>27</sup> Conduct Sheet, AAAB 482/50c. Also Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 4/2/1915, AAAB 482/38h, Knab, W. (NA)
- <sup>28</sup> Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 9/7/1915, AAAB 482/68c, Rodtnick, F. (NA)
- <sup>29</sup> Secretary of State for the Colonies to the New Zealand Governor, 6/4/1915. Also Lieut. Col. H.E. Plikington to Commandant, Somes Island, 15/4/1915. AD 1 51/324. (NA)
- <sup>30</sup> In his letter to Swiss Consul, W.J. Pugh, on 17/9/1918, Karl Joosten claimed that seven internees confined to the camp had died. (AAAB 449/52a, Complaints by POWs to American and Swiss Consuls). File AD 1 15/159, Graves, POW, Location and Register, lists four internee's graves (Landgraf, Schulte, Rohde and Volkmin). In addition, Kosel died while escaping on 31/7/1918 (AAAB 482/51f). Albert Heyer died on 25/9/1918, after Joosten wrote his aforementioned letter. (AAAB 482/61h, Heyer, A.) (NA)
- <sup>31</sup> J 46 225/1915, Inquest, Landgraf, W. (NA)
- <sup>32</sup> Report for the Prisoner of War Information Bureau, 5/9/1916, in AAAB 482/44f, Kellerman, F.). Report (to 31 May 1915) of Dispenser Hards on the Health of Prisoners and Sanitation of Somes Island, AD 1/39/124 (NA) Also AAAB 482/33I, Aleason, C. (NA)
- <sup>33</sup> These are the Somes Island Statements, MS 2071 (WTU) which began as letters to the American Consul General in late 1916, and the Somes Island Official Papers 1917-1918, Micro MS-18 (WTU), which were prepared for the 1918 Royal Commission. Copies of the 1916 statements also appear in individual internees' personal files and in AAAB 449/52a Complaints by POWs to American and Swiss Consuls (NA)
- <sup>34</sup> Philipp Baer to Justice Chapman (1918). Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>35</sup> Conduct Sheet. AAAB 482/38e Hinkelmann, W. (NA)
- <sup>36</sup> Conduct Sheet. AAAB 482/42g Pahlicke, W. (NA)
- <sup>37</sup> Conduct Sheet. AAAB 482/27e Volmker, W. (NA)
- <sup>38</sup> American Consul Brittain to Col. Robin, 18/3/1915. AD 1 59/62 German and Austrian Subjects in N.Z. re control of interests by American Consular Agency (NA)
- <sup>39</sup> Extract from Heyen's diary, read by the commandant and others on 8/3/1916, and related charge transcript attached to charge sheet dated 7 March 1916. AAAB 482/1f Heyen, B. (NA)
- <sup>40</sup> Letter dated September 1916 (Copy dated 25/11/1916) to the American Consul General, signed by B. Heyen, C. Hadler, F. Thoermer (perhaps 'Thurmer'), P. Baer, T. Keller, W. Moormeister and T. Titz. AAAB 449/52a (NA).
- <sup>41</sup> Bernard Heyen to Justice Chapman, (1918), Conrad Kirdorf to Justice Chapman, 5/4/1918, Micro MS-18 (WTU)



A view of Somes Island Internment Camp after the guards gave up their rotting dormitory and moved into tents. This indicates that the photo was taken after September 1914 and certainly before April 1916. The building in the foreground is the cattle shed, known to the internees as the "kuhstall" (cow-byre) or "klink", that served as the camp's lock-up. (Photo: F-112226-1/2, R. Hart Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library)

## VI

**The First Escapes**

On 16 March, probably due to his anxiety to put on a good show for the American Consul General, Matheson ordered Eduard Schober's squad (in Room 14) to carry gravel to repair a muddy path. At about "ten paces long" and leading from their door to the main track, the path required about 30 minutes' work<sup>1</sup>. When they refused to work without payment, Matheson nailed up the only door to their squadroom, reducing their accessway to a small square hole leading down to the "stable" (probably a downstairs room appropriated by the Agriculture Department) below<sup>2</sup>. During the day the men carried all food and drink through this hole. To use the latrines at night they crawled through a window and climbed down a ladder. Schober considered Matheson's "senseless" actions both inconvenient and dangerous, as some squad-members were aged around 60<sup>3</sup>.

Matheson ordered this squad to his office, where he first objected to their squad-leader, the recently interned 25-year-old seaman, Wilhelm Wenhold. Matheson later described Wenhold as "rough", "repulsive" and reputed to have killed men in the past<sup>4</sup>. When Matheson gave the squad five minutes to elect another leader, they re-elected Wenhold. Matheson called each man into his office individually and asked if he would work. When his turn came, Schober wanted to explain that he would work for payment, but could only say "yes" or "no". He said "No". Next Matheson, assisted by guards with fixed bayonets, lined up the squad and charged them with having an untidy room, breaking a ladder and relieving themselves out the window at night.

Schober told Justice Chapman in 1918 that a few days earlier Matheson had declared their room the cleanest in camp, while the ladder was already broken when given to them. Furthermore, Schober claimed no knowledge of anyone relieving themselves out the window. Naturally the squad denied any guilt. Schober attempted to explain that the charges were unjust, but Matheson allegedly responded with words to the effect of: "You dirty little swine, you insulted the British officer, I (will) knock you down into the

corner that you won't get up any more<sup>5</sup>." Schober claimed Matheson also took close interest in faulting him thereafter.

The six men received three days close confinement and 18 days hard labour, to be served in the Wellington Military (Alexandra) Barracks. There, as many other internees' stories attest, Schober and his companions also personally helped pay for alleged ill-treatment of British prisoners in Germany<sup>6</sup>. In fact, Justice Chapman said that in the end nineteen men from this squad and three others, finished up at the Detention Barracks at this time<sup>7</sup>.

If Matheson thought his problems now resided in Wellington, he was sadly mistaken. On 20 March he ordered Adolf Nawrath's squad to work. The following day they lined up in the yard for pick and shovel work, and once again Matheson asked each man if he would work. Nawrath - exempted from all work on 19 March due to Rheumatic fever and swollen legs - said "No," but received no chance to explain. The guards then arrested him and other squad-mates, and confined them to Room 14 for 21 days on bread and water.

Nawrath later informed Justice Chapman that Matheson and between two and six guards visited them day and night, forcing them to line up, do exercises and to salute him. Nawrath's legs hindered his ability to "exercise" to Matheson's satisfaction and eventually he refused to try. Matheson ordered him aside, and had him covered by a guard while his companions were asked if they had any complaints. When Nawrath tried to speak, Matheson reprimanded the guard for allowing him to speak at all. The group were then ordered outside onto a platform overlooking the yard. As Matheson left, Nawrath asked the Camp (medical) Dispenser if the promised medicine was the 21 days of bread and water.

Next day Matheson told the group that anyone refusing to exercise would be shot. Nawrath later wrote, "I refused to do exercises and was prepared to be shot sooner than suffer longer under such treatment in my state of health." The next day they were taken to the yard and were about to be "chased up and down the hills", when (Nawrath later learned) the Camp Dispenser told Matheson that Nawrath should not do this as he was

under medical treatment. Although he received a reprieve, the next morning all except three or four of the more sickly squad members (including Nawrath) performed this “exercise”<sup>8</sup>.

The more healthy members of this group later described the events of 22 March 1915 in a letter to the American Consul. Matheson allegedly forced the six men to crawl bent backwards under his walking stick, which he held horizontally 1.4 metres above ground. They repeated this action about eight times with the walking stick being lowered each time, until most had fallen on the ground. They were then forced to do handstands five times, bend their bodies until their noses touched the ground (sometimes assisted by the guards), and to do about fifty press-ups. They were then taken to the beach and twice forced to climb an “exceptionally” steep hill, before walking back and forth six times on the outside of a fence intended to stop sheep falling down a steep cliff.

During the night of 22-23 March, Matheson woke them hourly for Roll Call. At 10:00 pm on 23 March, they were forced outside, most half-dressed and many wearing only shirts, to repeat these “exercises”. When they refused to continue, Matheson purportedly boxed one in the ear and pushed each man over. At 6:00 am on 24 April, they again spent about fifteen minutes jumping fences measuring some 1.3 metres high. Matheson, they claimed, laughingly expressed the wish to see their necks broken. Matheson encouraged his soldiers to push them harder, and during a ten minute session spent running in a circle he also hit at least one man’s legs several times with his walking stick<sup>9</sup>.

Obviously other internees were well aware of these alleged activities. On 23 March, one “victim” asked Paul Wolf for some bread. Being unable to sleep that night, Wolf saw Matheson and the guards take lamps into Room 14 several times. The following morning, around 7:00am, a “victim” threw him a note from their window requesting help, as they could stand the treatment no longer<sup>10</sup>.

Wolf and a companion, Edward Bilke, both members of the notoriously defiant Squad 12<sup>11</sup>, concluded that the best way to get help was to swim to Petone and report the matter to the authorities. Leaving the island just after 8:00 am, via a steep bank at the

north end of the island, they swam first to Leper (Mokopuna) Island. There they crept through a natural tunnel so the guards would not see them leaving<sup>12</sup>. They reached the Petone Wharf, after a 2½ mile swim, at 10:15 am. Although Bilke lost his bundle of clothing en route, they successfully begged a singlet and trousers from a house on the Esplanade, where the woman-occupant also gave them a cup of tea<sup>13</sup>. They then went to the closest police station, where the police promised to report the matter to the Defence Department. The military authorities told the police to hold them until guards arrived. The police also requested dry clothing for the internees, and assured them that there would be no reprisals.

The military guard duly arrived minus the clothes. After handcuffing the men and chaining them together, the party returned to Wellington. There the pair were marched barefooted and bareheaded - in the rain - through the crowded streets, from Wellington Railway Station to the military goal. Many on-lookers followed the little entourage.

Second Lieutenant Rogers, the Assistant Commandant, met Wolf and Bilke at the jail between 4:00 pm and 5:00 pm. There, after promising to break their spirit, he deposited them in a concrete cell with no mattress, no blankets and no glass in the window. Wolf was also left wearing the clothes he swam ashore in. At 10:00 am the next day, he received a pair of trousers and a coat but no singlet or boots<sup>14</sup>.

Around 11:00 am on the 24th - when Wolf and Bilke were reported missing - all work on the island ceased, and Nawrath and companions were sent back to Room 14. Nawrath recorded:

Later the Commandant came to the Room and speaking to each of us expressed his apology at having punished us and hoped that we would forget and that we would carry gravel.

Nawrath, once again, refused to carry gravel due to his health. This time, however, "the Commandant released us from the rest of our sentence (of 21 days) of which we had only served three days and told each one to return to his own room<sup>15</sup>.

When asked at the Military gaol why he escaped, Wolf said he could no longer stand the way the guards treated the internees and that he wanted an inquiry held. Instead the pair

received 21 days hard labour with bread and water (3 days Close Detention and 18 days No. 2 Punishment Diet). On the 28th they were transferred to a wooden-floored cell, which had a blanket but no mattress. In addition, they could not wash for six days. On Good Friday, Rogers offered to exchange a warm meal for work. However, Wolf reminded him that it was a holiday.

On Easter Monday Rogers relented. Wolf later recalled that Rogers apologised for treating them so harshly, saying that these were Matheson's orders. That night he bought them some hash and, at about midnight, he brought them some porridge he had paid for personally. He asked them not to tell anyone on *Somes* that he had done this. Later Matheson ordered the men's transfer to a dark cell at the Police Station for 24 hours, before having them returned to the concrete cell at the military prison for another 24 hours.

It is noteworthy that in his memoirs, Rogers claimed that he followed alongside the pair in a launch as they swam ashore, and to have refused to pull them from the sea when they asked for help. Despite the clear discrepancy between the two versions, Rogers did remark that he "really liked" Wolf and Bilke, whom he considered "good chaps" with "plenty of guts"<sup>16</sup>.

Wolf said he was covered in lice by the time he returned to *Somes*. He asked for soap and soda to delouse himself, but Matheson ignored him. While he received new underclothes, he had to sew himself "new" trousers and a coat from old sacks. In addition, for the next several months the pair reported hourly to the office between 8:00 am and 6:00 pm<sup>17</sup>, while at least initially the guards checked the pair every two hours at night<sup>18</sup>. Allegedly Matheson and the guards made an example of the pair over subsequent months, including beatings and excessive punishments<sup>19</sup>.

Wolf later explained to Justice Chapman that the "escape" was both to "bring relief to my fellow internees who were being unjustly and barbarously ill-treated," and to "cause an enquiry to be held" into conditions on the island. However, instead:

The Defence Department blocked every chance of public opinion demanding an enquiry or of the Public becoming aware of the conditions...on the island. (In

addition) the Commandant and his fellow officers used the meanest and most cowardly means to punish me because I had risked my life for the sake of bringing relief to my co-internees who were cruelly and unjustly maltreated<sup>20</sup>.

In July 1915, the contents of an anonymous letter brought the situation that led to the 24 March escape to the attention of Matheson's superiors. As a result, Matheson explained that the original access to Room 14 was up a ladder through a trapdoor. The new path the squad objected to repairing, served a new railed staircase. It was this staircase that he closed for three days until three "well-conducted" internees spent two hours completing the path. He added that on two successive nights while the stairway was closed internees urinated from the window onto the sentries below. When they could not find the culprits, the guards punished the internees with twice-nightly urine parades for three nights. As the guards were angered by their earlier night-time "experiences", Matheson said he took the precaution of attending the parades also. He added that the punishment "exercise" consisted of "half an hour's easy work each morning for three days," and claimed that they were not knocked about or beaten. He claimed that the "most dangerous-looking recalcitrants" were imprisoned in Wellington, while the weaklings and misguided youths received minor restrictions on the island<sup>21</sup>.

In addition to direct punishments, three days after the escape Matheson significantly reduced the internees' access to parts of the island<sup>22</sup>. The whole northern portion of the island, as well as the bulk of the southern end, was declared out of bounds. This included the lighthouse area (which was always out of bounds), the paddocks for quarantined livestock and the coastline on the eastern side of the island excluding the wharf itself. The only length of coastline they retained access to was the rocky beach front on the western side of the island below the camp. Deciding factors in the choice of a special area for swimming and bathing were firstly, the:

Continued need to drive the prisoners out of their rooms, and to keep them from lounging uselessly about the camp in fine weather with the consequent evils following on useless, idle living.

Clearly Matheson's decision was influenced by his zest for healthy living. The second reason was that key vantage points, namely the points then known as Wichers, Livingstone and Telephone Peaks, allowed sentries to overlook the remaining accessible strip of shoreline<sup>23</sup>.

- <sup>1</sup> Conduct Sheet, AAAB 482/13c Michalon, J. Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 17/3/1915, AAAB 482/13a, Wenhold, W. (NA)
- <sup>2</sup> Fritz Schumacher to Justice Chapman, 3/4/1918. Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>3</sup> Eduard Ignaz Schober to Justice Chapman, 5/4/1918, Micro MS 18 (WTU)
- <sup>4</sup> Major Matheson to W.J. Pugh, 6/2/1918, AAAB 482/13a Wenhold, W. (NA)
- <sup>5</sup> Schober to Chapman, 5/4/1918, Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid. Schober adds that his statement was supported by his five companions, A. Zieger, H. Mittlacher, W. Wenhold, J. Mitcholam (Joseph Meshoullam) and W. Rauer.
- <sup>7</sup> *AJHR*, 1919. H-33. p. 5
- <sup>8</sup> Adolf Nawarath to Justice Chapman, (1918). Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>9</sup> W. Knapek, F. Allmeritter, F. Schwarz, Albert Graw, J. Krippner and W. Otteng to American Consul, 24/11/1916. AAAB 482/32f, Allmeritter, F. (NA)
- <sup>10</sup> Paul Wolf to Justice Chapman, 5/4/1918. Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>11</sup> EP 11/8/1956, p 22 'Know Your Wellington'. Also Hearing re 'Disloyal Utterances', 5/5/1917. AAAB 482/37b, Schumacher, F. A list of Squadleaders as at early 1917, appears in AAAB 482/1j, Schneider (Schader), E. This shows Schumacher as Squad 12's leader. (NA)
- <sup>12</sup> Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 27/3/1915, AAAB 482/32j, Bilke, E. (NA)
- <sup>13</sup> Undated description of escape by Bilke and Wolf, AAAB 482/32j (NA)
- <sup>14</sup> Paul Wolf to Justice Chapman, 5/4/1918. Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>15</sup> Adolf Nawrath to Justice Chapman, (undated - 1918). Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>16</sup> Stan Rogers to Harold, 15/1/1915 [sic], MS-Papers-5553-1 (WTU)
- <sup>17</sup> Paul Wolf to Justice Chapman, 5/4/1918, Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>18</sup> Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 8/5/1915, AAAB 482 69b Rediger, F. (NA)
- <sup>19</sup> Eduard Bilke to American Consul General, 25/11/1916, AAAB 482/32j (NA)
- <sup>20</sup> Paul Wolf to Justice Chapman, 5/4/1918, Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>21</sup> Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 9/7/1915 AAAB 482/68c, Rodtnick, F. (NA)
- <sup>22</sup> Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 27/3/1915 AAAB 482/32j (NA)
- <sup>23</sup> Orders by Major Matheson to the Prisoners of War, 28/3/1915. Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 29/3/1915. AD 1 15/161, Guards, Somes Island, General File (NA)



A self-portrait by travelling entertainer Rinaldo, complete with his trained "smoking dog". Christmas 1915 evidently proved a memorable occasion. Based on a number of statements and extracts from letters by internees, Major Matheson granted them permission to hold a Christmas Concert until midnight, probably just before Christmas Day. In addition, several people around New Zealand, including Willi Fels, the only German Consul not interned, also donated money for a "Christmas Gift Fund for Prisoners of War." Unfortunately, the usual tensions on the island continued with at least one of the tougher inmates clashing with Sergeant Williams, the Camp Policeman, in the days prior to Christmas Day. The Christmas Concert started at about 8:00 pm. However, after a "disgusting exhibition" by Rinaldo at about 11:00 pm, the concert ended abruptly when Matheson ordered that the instruction "First Post" be blown. Enquires revealed that earlier in the evening Rinaldo had "also made an offensive reference to New Zealand soldiers."

On the evening of Christmas Day, the "absolutely drunk" Sergeant Laine arrived at the "cowshed" (the lock-up) dressed in what presumably was Rinaldo's clown suit (this being a most unusual garment to find in a prisoner of war internment camp). There he began ordering the inmates to repeatedly stand up and sit down and to salute him. The inmates included former escapee Eduard Bilke, who received 21 days detention on Christmas Day for failing to answer a bugle call. Sergeant Laine's records show that in February 1916 he was demoted - due to drunkenness - to Corporal for several weeks. Interestingly, in November 1919 Rinaldo wrote to the Minister of Defence asking why the internees had never been permitted to celebrate Christmas with such Christian customs as dinners, presents and, of course, liberty.

(Photo: Autograph Book of Molly Smith, Dargaville. This copy made available by the Department of Conservation, Wellington Conservancy. Other sources include National Archives files: AAAB 482/32j, Bilke, E., AAAB 482/38g, Hadler, C., AAAB 482/69e Ludwig, G., AAAB 482/36g, Rinaldo, Z, AAAB 482/2a Tamme, E.R.R. (Robert Hall), and NZDF Personnel Archives file: SI/216, Laine, R. A photo of the "smoking prisoner of war dog" later appeared in the *Auckland Weekly News*, 20/4/1916, p. 41)

## VII

**Barbed Wire Heaven?**

Clearly the escape by Wolf and Bilke impacted heavily on conditions on *Somes*. The prisoners now recognised the futility of attempting to explain their plight to the outside world. Meanwhile, Matheson and his staff, although perhaps more conscious of their misdeeds, remained free to exercise their harsh control. Even so, in the early evening of 4 May, only a fortnight after the first escape, Frederick Rediger and Bruno Kuskie stole a small boat belonging to the lighthouse keepers and left the island.

Unlike their predecessors, Rediger and Kuskie's goal was not some noble cause. Sick of the idle life, they hoped to find work in the back country. The boat reappeared near Days Bay<sup>1</sup> and they were caught the following day at Orongorongo Station. For their trouble they received a prison sentence of 90 days hard labour<sup>2</sup>. Eighteen months later Kuskie convinced his captors that in fact he was an Australian of British descent, with a history of escaping from orphanages. His internment was an unplanned consequence of using an assumed German name in August 1914. His basic German, learned while living near the Upper Moutere German settlement in 1914, subsequently improved in "Heinsen's and Wohlfarth's class" on *Somes*. An inquiry revealed that just as Gottfried Heinsen taught William Henry Aspinall (alias Kuskie) German, so too did Aspinall teach Heinsen English. It also revealed Aspinall's discomfort among the Germans, and that initially he feared admitting his true nationality in case he remained interned<sup>3</sup>.

Two days after the pair were safely back on *Somes*, a German submarine sank *Lusitania* off Ireland. This incident caused fury throughout the British Empire and ultimately helped bring the United States into the war. Retaliations in New Zealand included the dismissal of some German employees, and angry anti-German displays and recommendations at patriotic meetings<sup>4</sup>. For some free "enemy aliens" at that time, *Somes* probably seemed like a sanctuary.

Days after the Rediger-Kuskie escape, Matheson contacted the Adjutant General regarding security on the island. He advised that he was already preparing new rules to

curtail the liberties of internees as the camp's layout was incompatible with military needs. Furthermore, while Wolf and Bilke received the maximum sentence Matheson could then inflict, this time he wanted "a more salutary punishment." As result, a Military Court awarded the aforementioned 90 day sentences<sup>5</sup>, following which Matheson had the guards secretly watch the pair<sup>6</sup>.

Even in 1900, Dugald Matheson - then a primary school teacher - actively promoted the value of physical education. That year he presented a paper at the Teachers' Institute extolling the virtues of healthy bodies as a key step toward creating healthy minds. The *Feilding Star* subsequently published the lengthy item:

Living as we do in an age when so much energy is spent in obtaining the best results in mental training, there was never a greater need for attention to the body - "the temple of the soul"; no time when the fact should be impressed more on those in charge of the rising generation "that it is not a soul, it is not a body that we are making, but a man, and we cannot divide him."

Matheson went on to describe the way people judged animals by their body-shape, contrasting this with the apparent lack of interest in school children's lung capacity. Outlining a range of possible problems that might derive from under-utilised lung capacity (that is, inadequate exercise), he went on to explain that good food and air, and even out-door exercise, could still fail to "cultivate a good chest or a good pair of arms."

He explained:

On the contrary, a youth who devotes 8 hours per day to mental work and 20 minutes per day to well directed physical exercise will in six months' time be of decidedly superior physique to what he would have been had he devoted his entire time for the same period to ordinary outdoor labour.

The fact is before us that thousands of children in our educational district are suffering from the great want of organised physical education. The child who expends 25 hours per week in a school must of necessity be affected by the "waste of the unused organs" which can be avoided only by attention to the training of the body. Is it not, therefore, only fair that the parent who is compelled by law to submit his children to a course of mental development, may demand that, instead of their languishing physically in the process, and instead of the body being divided from the mind that these be educated together in beautiful harmony.

No satisfactory result, (he said) can be expected in this direction until "physical culture" finds a permanent position in every school time-table, and until it finds a prominent place in every annual school report<sup>7</sup>.

Matheson explained that “the land is awakening to the need of drilling our young people”, and that teachers must expect to carry out this work. The teachers themselves would benefit personally from indulging in exercise, with:

Improved health, strength, and activity, the disappearance of worry (the sure companion of mental exertion overdone, and physical exercise neglected), and the dawn of a brighter view of the world generally - the physical training of the young will truly become to them a labor of love.

The time is now ripe for a great movement in the direction of military drill, which, even if not supplemented by gymnastics, is of so much value in training children in order, obedience, promptness and activity, that it behoves all teachers to give it their strongest support. Then in dealing with (our) boys - the men of tomorrow - we should ever bear in mind that the age of peace shows no signs of its coming, and who knows how soon the time may arrive when it will be good for us to know that our land possess an abundant supply of lads who can truly say:- “The sergeant arsk no questions, but he winked the other eye, He says to me ‘Shun,’ and I shunted, the same as in days gone by; For he saw the set o’ my shoulders, an’ I couldn’t help ‘oldin straight, When me and the other rookies came under the barrick gate”<sup>8</sup>.

While his pupils’ achievements at football and athletics earned Matheson considerable respect at Stanway School (a rural settlement behind the German settlement at Halcombe, near Feilding)<sup>9</sup>, his adult charges on *Somes* were somewhat less enthused. The internees considered their own voluntary open-air exercises such as gymnastics, swimming and fishing, in addition to their ordinary work around the camp, provided all the exercise they required. Instead they considered that they endured constant bullying by seemingly sadistic guards who always appeared to seek “out men against whom to lay charges under the very numerous regulations.” The internees considered this a constant source of irritation and unnecessary hardship<sup>10</sup>. Considering remarks on the conduct sheets of many internees, there can be no doubt that charges for trivial misconduct - and even seemingly non-existent misconduct - could attract many days of forced hard labour around the island.

In 1918, Karl Joosten informed Justice Chapman that “healthful exercise” was an admitted necessity in a camp such as this. However, Major Matheson’s version of “healthful exercise” could not be:

Equalled in its actual execution by any penal institution extant in New Zealand. I have seen several of these and have never seen greater severity and degrading conditions than applied here. (Joosten wrote that) in the course of such “exercises”

our men have dug acres of hard paddock ground to plant lucerne etc., for the Agricultural Department, and vegetables to keep Your Majesty's forces on this Island supplied. Our men have encircled the Island with roads, built exercise grounds, drains etc., and generally prepared this place for its present, and later similar purposes<sup>11</sup>.

Joosten said that internees endured this enforced "exercise", which Matheson evidently called "General Fatigue", for no pay or tobacco, something he claimed even felons would receive. Then after work - which included carrying sand or gravel on their backs from the beach to the camp - they could not go to their rooms to wash or change until a designated time. Joosten added that he used the word "exercise" as:

Work cannot legally be imposed upon Civilian Internees, as was stated by the Hon. Mr Herdman before Parliament, and which also has been openly admitted by the Commandant here in Camp<sup>12</sup>.

Internees complained in 1918 that since March 1915 they had been "compelled to perform" such things as:

Road-making, carrying stones, constructing a rifle range, exercise ground or parade ground, making drains etc. Sometimes prisoners are compelled to do stone-breaking and very often they have to perform work of an almost senseless nature such as carrying sand and gravel in bags from some parts of the beach to the camp which is situated about 160 feet above.

The internees' view of "General Fatigue" was that it "largely appears to us as purely chicane [a low trick] exercise and as a means of getting work done on this island by unpaid and forced labour"<sup>13</sup>.

In 1918, Philipp Baer wrote:

Anyone of the Guard on the Island could give a prisoner a few days' labour and if (the prisoner) dared to call on the Commandant for justice, he would get exactly the opposite to justice. The Commandant would ask (the prisoner) no questions, but just give him double the term of what the guard gave him, or 21 days arrest with ill-treatment on the North-end of the Island. There was hardly a time in the last 2½ years when there was not somebody under arrest<sup>14</sup>.

In April 1916, L.S. Fanning wrote of the internees' life on the island, as he saw it, his visit coinciding with American Consul General Winslow's second inspection visit. Fanning mentioned the small inlet at the north end of the island then known as "Kulture Bay". Described as a narrow flat patch beside the sea, between very steep slopes at the

north end of the island, this appears to be one of the small inlets at its north-eastern tip. Matheson did not identify it on the map of the island he drew in 1915<sup>15</sup>. Fanning's readers learned that internees considered deserving of a thrashing (namely the "breakers of the regulations" or "close prisoners") were taken there to receive their "exercise". The Germanised spelling of "kulture" (correctly spelt "Kultur") adopted for this secluded inlet, was used as a sarcastic means to portray the guards' perception of German culture, namely cruelty and brutality. This, after all, was how the Allied media portrayed the German army. Fanning wrote:

A little of this healthful "kulture" has proved a good cure for insubordination or other misbehaviour. The prisoners have the choice of easy days with the tonic of moderate appetising work, or rigorous discipline, and the general disposition now is to take the line of least resistance<sup>16</sup>.

Fanning's words do not, however, suggest that this "appetising work" was paid, voluntary labour.

References to Kulture Bay in internee complaints mostly date from 1915, the period when most conflict occurred. For example, Alfred Dethloff and five others (Trunt, Rodtnick, Hadler, Zieger and Kabierski) were taken there in mid-May 1915, after accusations - which they denied - that they had spoken during Roll Call. They worked with pick and shovel for a few days, then on about 17 May, Sergeant Trotter forced them, one at a time, to march up and down the beach in military fashion, to salute him and to call him "Sir". Matheson watched this from the hilltop.<sup>17</sup> Albert Zieger wrote that several times Matheson even brought his wife to witness the beatings, insults and degradations that they experienced. Zieger eventually pleaded guilty to having laughed at Roll Call, simply to end the punishment despite claiming innocence<sup>18</sup>. The guards took Philipp Baer and two others to Kulture Bay in June 1915. Another half-dozen soldiers watched and sometimes participated in the beating that followed. Baer alleged that his "crime" was asking what he had done to deserve the previous punishment, namely gravel-carrying<sup>19</sup>.

Major Matheson's son, Lance Corporal (sometimes referred to as Private) William Matheson<sup>20</sup>, also served on the island. Due to this relationship he seems to have, on the one hand, enjoyed extra power, while, on the other, he endured extra contempt - in

comparison with other guards - from the prisoners. For example, in May 1917, self-proclaimed Dutchman Johan Slijm (the authorities considered him German), received 21-days of hard labour with bread and water for writing to relatives in Holland complaining about his treatment on the island. In 1918, Slijm claimed that William Matheson ordered him to strip naked in the gaol and to stand for fifteen minutes on the concrete floor, during very cold, windy weather. He also threatened Slijm with a "hiding just as the Germans received it," as well as allegedly throwing away some of Slijm's breakfast. Slijm's problems on Somes included the considerable difficulty he faced proving he was Dutch and thus neutral<sup>21</sup>.

In July 1917, Christian Kienke received seven days of hard labour for being a few minutes late to Roll Call, despite arriving before the guards read out his name. On the first day, he and others worked all day in the rain digging in oats. Kienke said he developed a cough and diarrhea on that night, but was still forced to work with pick and shovel all the next day. On the third day he eventually convinced the doctor he was sick and was exempted from all work, only to have William Matheson take him before his father on a charge of failing to work. Confirmation of the doctor's orders eventually led to the charges being dropped<sup>22</sup>.

Another staff member targeted for special contempt was Sergeant Williams, a part-Maori who served as the "Camp Policeman". While Williams appears rather cruel, his critics' views of him were also very racist. For example, Arthur Ibelhauser complained to Justice Chapman that in December 1915 Williams sentenced him to 7 days hard labour for arriving at Roll Call slightly late. Matheson then refused to hear Ibelhauser's protest. In 1918 Ibelhauser wrote:

It is against any custom in the entire civilised world to leave to the caprice of a subordinated person, like the coloured Sgt. Williams, to punish in a most presumptuous manner a civilian internee.

In May and July 1916, Williams sentenced Ibelhauser to 7 and 21 days hard labour respectively, on what Ibelhauser claimed to be false charges. Major Matheson again refused to review the charges<sup>23</sup>.

Paul Martens was on bullock-wagon-pulling duty when the overloaded wagon tipped over while en route to the camp. For carrying one box up the hill, Williams sentenced him to 7 days fatigue. Refusing to hear Martens' complaint personally, Major Matheson referred the matter back to Williams, who increased the sentence to 21 days. The matter escalated when Martens again refused the sentence. Guards with fixed bayonets, accompanied Martens to Matheson's office. However, while Williams searched for Matheson, Corporal Cook appeared from the kitchen and asked Martens what had happened. Satisfied with his explanation, Cook dismissed Martens and suggested he "keep out of Sergeant Williams' way for some time and everything would be alright then." Martens heard no more of the matter<sup>24</sup>.

Hermann Gönning was a member of an "Invalid Squad" evidently formed in mid-1915. This squad's fatigue duties consisted of yard-cleaning. Unfortunately, Gönning complained in 1918, they performed this duty seven days per week and even when the other fatigue gangs did not work due to bad weather, the Invalid Squad worked. Gönning said that they had no oilskins - a predicament not resolved until mid-1918<sup>25</sup> - and thus their clothes became soaked. Until Sergeant Williams left the island, they were also forced to push wheel-barrow loads of rubbish up from the wharf. Williams clearly had a special place - as a particularly callous enforcer - in the minds of the Invalid Squad and others<sup>26</sup>.

In 1916, Luciana Lenaz allegedly swore at an officer and was locked up. He had reacted badly to some medicine and accused the medicine dispenser of trying to poison him. Lenaz later told Justice Chapman, that Sergeant Williams and William Matheson delivered his food to the gaol, however, he refused to eat it, claiming that it was bad. Lenaz claimed in his statement that Williams hit him on the back with a bayonet, causing him to bleed. Next Williams, Matheson junior and three other guards were said to have forced Lenaz to either put his feet into a bucket of hot water or have a bayonet put through his stomach. Lenaz said the skin came off his legs as a result. The next day Lenaz asked Major Matheson if he could go to hospital, but was told that some medicine would cure him<sup>27</sup>.

While Lenaz's accusation against the dispenser may have been an over-reaction, his accusations against the guards, even when allowing for possible exaggeration, were not unusual. Matheson, however, considered Lenaz "mentally abnormal and possessed of an unfortunate wit which rendered (him) the avowed enemy of soldiers and Germans." He added that out of pity for him he allowed him to live in an isolated place and, due to his health (he was asthmatic), excused him from all work. However, he could do voluntary work for the good of the camp, for which he received such things as tobacco, garden seeds, fishing lines, tools and pocket money<sup>28</sup>. Other accusations by internees against specific guards included one against an office employee who was dismissed for theft<sup>29</sup>.

In 1900, Dugald Matheson wrote to the *Feilding Star* complaining at the financial penalties and other burdens placed upon members of the Manawatu Mounted Rifles, to which he had been connected for some years. These, along with monotonous drills, had caused many to resign<sup>30</sup>. Unfortunately Matheson forgot this lesson, as forcibly applied monotonous routine proved even less inspiring on Somes than it had in the Manawatu Mounted Rifles.

Arthur Ibelhauser complained to Justice Chapman in 1918:

It is a well-known fact for all the internee's here, that if anybody tries to explain or excuse his conduct, or to complain about a penalty, the Mayor [sic] would make his fine more severe. (The) civilian internees in this camp are helplessly abandoned to the despotism and caprice of the Commandant and his guard.

He added that he feared further such treatment, including "possible reprisals which might be inflicted through my having made these complaints"<sup>31</sup>. Kurt Hennig also protested to Chapman that internees complaining about unfair sentences frequently found their sentences increased, "up to seven-fold". In addition, he and many others objected to the manner in which "any NCO or Guard who might take it into his head" could punish an internee. He then listed 47 men punished due to the guards' perception that they had not put enough quarry gravel into their bags. The internees considered that, in accordance with military discipline, only the Commandant had the right to inflict punishment<sup>32</sup>. Justice Chapman agreed with them.

Alfred A. Winslow, who replaced J.I. Brittain as New Zealand's American Consul General, made his first inspection visit to the island on 25 August 1915. He also requested a report on the treatment of prisoners of war on *Somes*<sup>33</sup>. It is unfortunate that his most important first report - probably based, therefore, on a (sanitised ?) report prepared by Matheson - is yet to be traced, as subsequent reports usually include comments such as "same as the last report". Similarly, newspapers did not apparently report this visit.

It is possible to perceive Winslow's apparent short cut in the preparation of his report, as contributing significantly to Matheson's (and the New Zealand Government's) reinterpretation of the Hague Convention's rule on payment for work. Certainly, his efforts fall well short of those attributed to American Camp Inspectors working in Britain's prisoner of war camps. Those people visited camps freely without prior warning (thus preventing quick tidy-ups) and could talk with internees without the presence of British officers<sup>34</sup>.

On 6 April 1916, Alfred Winslow again visited *Somes*, which then housed 246 internees, while another was at Porirua Mental Hospital. In light of known happenings on *Somes* prior to this time, it is surprising to discover just how contented Winslow found the internees. There were no complaints about sleeping accommodation, sanitary arrangements or food. Work was done voluntarily when required for a payment of 3/- per day. At the time, 68 internees were employed to build the new guards' accommodation, while another two were cooks. He noted the group's hobbies and that exercise consisted of marching around the island and swimming on certain beaches between 6:00 am and 5:00-6:00 pm. He spoke to all who wished to speak to him and formed the impression that "all of the prisoners who mentioned the matter spoke well of the Commandant, Major D. Matheson"<sup>35</sup>. Of course, evidence strongly suggests that those who detested Matheson were unlikely to tell Winslow.

<sup>1</sup> Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 15/5/1915. AAAB 482/69b, Rediger, F. (NA)

<sup>2</sup> Report re. attempted escape of POWs Rediger and Kuskie. AAAB 482/69b (NA)

<sup>3</sup> Re: POW S.I. 108, Bruno Kuskie, 'Questions to identify Prisoner's identity as British Subject'. AAAB 482/41g Kuskie, B. (NA)

<sup>4</sup> e.g. EP 11/5/1915 2(5 & 8), 6(7), 8(8), 12/5/1915 6(4-5,9), 7(7), 13/5/1915 2(4), 3(7) and so on over subsequent days.

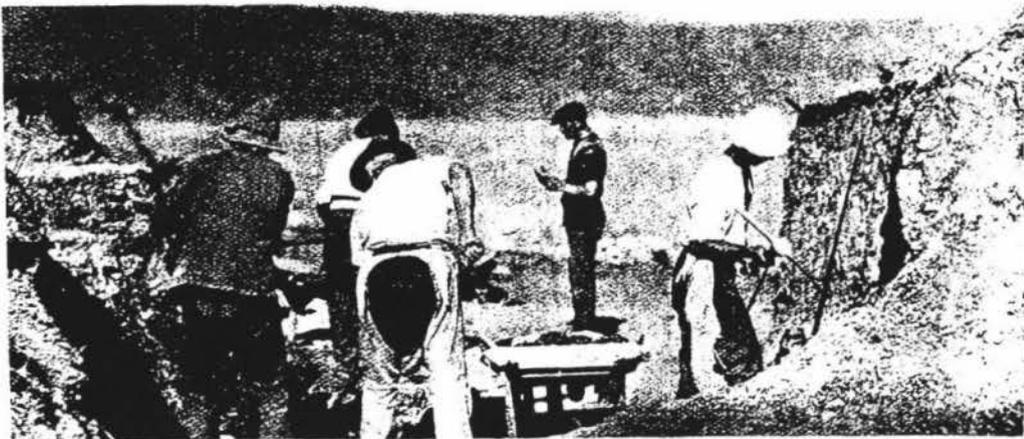
<sup>5</sup> Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 8/5/1915. AAAB 482/69b (NA)

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- <sup>6</sup> Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 15/5/1915. AAAB 482/41g (NA)
- <sup>7</sup> FS 13/12/1900 2(8)
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> FS 26/3/1901 2(5)
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>11</sup> K. Joosten to Justice Chapman, 26/3/1918, Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup> Gottfried Heinsen and c148 others, to Justice Chapman, 2/4/1918, Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>14</sup> Philipp Baer to Justice Chapman (1918), Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>15</sup> Orders by the Commandant, 28/3/1915. AD 1 15/161, Guards, Somes Island, General File. (NA)
- <sup>16</sup> *New Zealand Herald* (NZH) 7/4/1916 4(8)
- <sup>17</sup> Alfred Detloff to Justice Chapman, 5/4/1918, Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>18</sup> Albert Zieger to Justice Chapman, 5/4/1918, Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>19</sup> Philipp Baer to Justice Chapman, (1918), Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>20</sup> Although Personnel Archives' staff could not trace William (Bill) Matheson's military records, he is referred to as Lance Corporal W. Matheson on 20/10/1916, when Otto Klock threatened him with violence. Klock had just failed to call Major Matheson "Sir". He underwent Court Martial as a result. AAAB 482/39a Klock, O. (NA)
- <sup>21</sup> Johann Slijm to Justice Chapman, 5/4/1918, Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>22</sup> Christian Kienke to Justice Chapman, (1918), Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>23</sup> Arthur Ibelhauser to Justice Chapman, 5/4/1918, Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>24</sup> Kurt Hennig to Justice Chapman, (1918), Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>25</sup> AD 1 13/350, Oilskins, POWs. (NA)
- <sup>26</sup> Hermann Gönning, 3/4/1918, Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>27</sup> Luciana Lenaz to Justice Chapman, (1918), Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>28</sup> Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 29/4/1919. AAAB 482/5c, Lenaz, L. (NA)
- <sup>29</sup> Eduard Pottkamper to Justice Chapman, 3/4/1918, Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>30</sup> FS 10/2/1900 2(7) 'War Jottings', 15/2/1900 2(8) 'Mounted Rifles' (Matheson's reply)
- <sup>31</sup> Arthur Ibelhauser to Justice Chapman, 5/4/1918, Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>32</sup> Kurt Hennig to Justice Chapman, (1918), Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>33</sup> A.A. Winslow to Minister of Defence, 19/8/1915. Lieut. Col. H.E. Pilkington to Commandant, Somes Island, 27/8/1915. AD 1 59/62, German & Austrian Subjects in N.Z. re control of interests by American Consular Agency. (NA)
- <sup>34</sup> EP 23/10/1916 2(6-7)
- <sup>35</sup> *AJHR*, 1917, A-1, pp. 10-13



(Above) The first group of men leave after morning Roll Call. (Photo: *Auckland Weekly News*, 20/4/1916, p. 41)

(Below) A deceptive photo of "work for which interned aliens are paid: prisoners on Somes Island engaged in making roads." Certainly, while some men were paid 3/- per day to construct the new road up to the camp during 1916. According to L.S. Fanning's article in the *New Zealand Herald* of 7 April 1916 the supply of volunteers to perform this paid work exceeded demand. Unfortunately other men appear to have been forced to do the work for free as part of their General Fatigue (forced exercise) and as punishment. (Photo: *Auckland Weekly News*, 20/4/1916, p. 40)



## VIII

**Messages in Bottles**

The camp cooks enjoyed the rare privilege of regular wages throughout the war. However, on 14 May 1916, for as yet unknown reasons, Military Headquarters stopped their payment of 5/-[sic] per day. This major step, which evidently caused considerable discussion amongst the internees<sup>1</sup>, coincided with paid construction-work by volunteer internee labour on two long narrow hutments (or barracks) at a rate of 3/- per day. One hutment was to accommodate the ever-increasing internee population. The other was for the guards<sup>2</sup>.

One evening in mid-July, the internees learned, to quote two German internees, "that all those Ungarians and Dalmatian [sic] should be shifted into the new buildings"<sup>3</sup>. As evidence suggests that the Dalmatians and Germans did not get along, this move probably also both caused and alleviated tension within the camp. Perhaps as compensation for Germans who possibly resented this move, the unexpectedly aerated nature of this building (because of its exposed location on Somes) eventually led to its appearance in Chapman's Inquiry<sup>4</sup>.

Despite these aggravations, the internees considered that the lowest point in their relationship with Matheson came on 16 August 1916. That day he called the squad leaders together and released a tirade of abuse towards them, other Germans, Germany, its Government and its leader. The internees felt so insulted by the speech they christened the "Kaiser Rede" (so-named for Kaiser Wilhelm II's own well-known identical method of humiliating his Generals) that they transcribed his words sufficiently well for Matheson to accept them as generally correct at the 1918 Inquiry<sup>5</sup>.

Although dates conflict slightly, evidence suggests that on the evening of 15 August, Matheson received a letter stating that if he "continued to torture and ill-treat his prisoners something would happen to him"<sup>6</sup>. Evidently, the letter appeared just as he completed his report to Headquarters. The letter - an "abominable document", he said -

seriously insulted both Matheson and the Guard, and left Matheson so incensed that he promptly destroyed his report.

Matheson claimed to suspect one man (possibly Carl Mumme<sup>7</sup>) to be its author, but having no proof, gave the squad leaders an hour to produce the culprit. In addition to describing the Kaiser as “one of the dirtiest and filthiest curs that ever stepped on a throne,” he went on to describe his own family’s rôle in the war. He said two of his sons were at the Front, and before they left their mother warned them to die fighting and not to become prisoners “of those infamous Germans.” Matheson shared her dread of the latter fate for their sons. This outburst of private wrath particularly upset the internees<sup>8</sup>.

While accepting that some internees were “respectable people”, he regarded about fifty as “curs.” His tirade continued with the claim that he had tried to make their lives as pleasant as possible, but in response considered that he - along with his staff - had been continually insulted. This he considered to be an insult to the British Government, the “greatest Government in the World”. Contrary to the internees’ aforementioned views, Matheson considered the first insult toward him by the internees took place in August 1915. On that occasion an internee placed a picture of Matheson and his staff on the “locker box” with the inscription, “N.Z. Last Hope”[sic]. Matheson described how he had kicked the box off the wall and jumped on it, and added that the internees still suffered for that insult. After comparing their ration scale with that offered to Germany’s prisoners, he began waving first one revolver and then his second, while inviting the internees to challenge the guards. He warned them that unless they turned over the culprit within an hour, he intended cutting their rations and withdrawing their privileges. The internees’ transcript of the speech ended with:

Now, if one of you threatens even the meanest of my men and I can prove it - by God - it will be the last thing he ever does. Right turn, dismissed<sup>9</sup>.

The August 1915 agitation included an incident when Matheson allowed the internees to celebrate the birthday of Austro-Hungarian Emperor, Franz Joseph. Matheson became somewhat upset when he learned that internee, Harald Kriemendahl, had also composed for the occasion a set of versus libelling him<sup>10</sup>.

The incident that led to the August 1916 outburst involved two internees, Albert Kraut and Hugo Kosel. Both subsequently found other places in the camp's history; Kraut escaped twice and Kosel died during the first of those escape attempts. Both were under sentence for offences essentially amounting to not working when they should have been. For example, an old leg injury hindered Kosel. Kraut, who said usual working hours were 8:30 to 10:30 am and 1:30 to 3:30 pm, stopped work at 3:30 pm, only to find himself on a charge. Matheson later claimed that as he was already working as a punishment, he should not have stopped at that time. Both men claimed that the main trouble occurred on 13 August, when each, while defending himself on the charge, forgot to refer to Matheson as "Sir".

When brought back before Matheson on the 14th, after being locked up overnight, Kosel refused to speak at all. Kraut, on the other hand, asked for an interpreter (he claimed he took too long to find the right words in English). Matheson promptly ordered him back to the lock-up. Shortly afterwards Matheson allegedly attacked Kraut (then aged about 19) at the lock-up, resulting in the pair wrestling together for several minutes. The handcuffed pair were then taken to the boat for a trip to Wellington for a medical check-up prior to punishment. However, Kraut (whose hands were handcuffed behind him) claimed Matheson pushed him down the steep ladder from the wharf, causing him to land face-first on the boat's deck. There Matheson again attacked him, attempting to wrench the handcuffs from his hands, then twisting his leg until the pain caused Kraut to lash out, thus compounding the issue. After some unsympathetic medical attention, the pair returned to Matheson's not-too-tender care.

After Matheson checked the resulting medical examination papers, Kraut and Kosel both claimed that he said:

"March them up the road, now we can have some fun". Thereupon we were lead the way up the hill and down again on the other side to the beach (North End or Kulture Bay)

While Kosel waited his turn in the next little bay, Matheson forced Kraut to run around a heap of gravel as fast as he could. Meanwhile, Matheson and the soldiers abused, tripped and pushed him with their fists. After about 30 minutes, Matheson ordered Kraut to carry some gravel up the hill. When he was:

Some way up the hill I looked down and saw that Kosel had been fetched over and was (being) treated in a like manner as I had been experiencing.

Kosel rushed into the water, where he fell, only to have Camp Policeman "Warren" (Sergeant Hans Wahren who had accompanied them to Wellington<sup>11</sup>) stop him from standing up by holding his leg. Allegedly Wahren then pushed Kosel's head underwater three times. After about 30 minutes of abuse, the guards brought Kosel back to the camp, where he and Kraut were again locked in the camp lock-up, a converted "cow stall" (a cattle stable). The guards then removed most of the straw (their bedding), on Matheson's orders, from the shed's concrete floor. The humiliation continued during the evening with the pair forced on several occasions to salute Matheson and to run around. After hourly wakenings by guards throughout the night, the episode continued on 15 August, with Matheson arriving in his pyjamas at 5:30 am. Both Kraut and Kosel claim that amongst other abuse, Matheson unsuccessfully tried to force them onto their knees. When they did nothing he rushed them back into the cell.

There is no evidence that Matheson found the culprit. However, Kraut reappeared before Matheson on 16 August also. Matheson abused him furiously, with Kraut claiming Matheson said he had "received a letter of menace in which I (Matheson) am warned that if I should beat you again something will happen to me." Accusing Kraut of being one of the fifty who opposed him, he held his two revolvers to Kraut's face and threateningly said: "I am ready for you fellows." After extolling the virtues of bayoneting Kraut or hitting him over the head with a rifle, Matheson sentenced him to three days close confinement, 18-days on No. 2 Diet and three months on light fatigues. He explained that the sentence was specifically to show Kraut "that I am not afraid of that letter". After his release from the sentence, the sergeant warned Kraut not to tell other internees about happens during his detention, as if Matheson found out he would order Kraut's immediate arrest<sup>12</sup>. Kraut took no notice.

The description of abuse inflicted upon Kraut and Kosel differs little in its graphic nature - nor in the extent of Matheson's personal participation - from many other statements by internees. Possibly though it occurred later in the camp's history and certainly it involved one of its youngest and perhaps most emotionally fragile internees. For example, Kraut

attempted suicide on 31 January 1917, after falling out with a friend<sup>13</sup>. At the resulting Court of Inquiry, Kraut said the treatment he received in August had worried him ever since. He kept to himself and avoided the company of others. Matters came to a head, though, on the day he attempted to end his life. After asking Kraut's age (he was 20), Matheson proceeded to grill him over the incident that caused the original charge. Despite extracting a fatherly "my boy" from Matheson, Kraut's frustration at the manner in which Matheson avoided discussing the subsequent ill-treatment is clear<sup>14</sup>.

Justice Chapman took some interest in the August 1916 incident but considered Hugo Kosel's "very long narrative" to contain the "usual kind of exaggeration" he met with on *Somes*. Sergeant Wahren returned from overseas service during the Inquiry and provided an "entirely different version" of the event. Wahren claimed that the pair "met with an accident and fell together into the water". He said they returned to the camp "at once" and that he ensured Kosel was dried properly, with the assistance of others, before he himself changed his clothes. Chapman somewhat naively cast Kosel's story aside and wrote in his report that "this exaggeration colours (Kosel's) whole evidence"<sup>15</sup>. Wahren's own circumstances are, however, of note. The son of Swiss immigrants, his father, "Godfrey" Wahren, was probably Gottfried Wahren, the Wellington tobacconist, who was punched in the face by a misguided German-hater in 1914<sup>16</sup>.

Surprisingly, the day after the "Kaiser Rede" the authorities resumed paying wages to the camp's cooks<sup>17</sup>. Given Matheson's hasty backdown on his treatment of lesser offenders when Wolf and Bilke escaped to seek help in March 1915, it is possible that once again Matheson reviewed the potential consequences of his actions and moderated his stance - at least to a select group of less disliked internees. Of 46-year-old father of five, Carl Mumme (who, perhaps significantly, had been interned in early May 1916), Matheson wrote on 18 August that while he had no proof of hostile conduct by Mumme within the camp, he appeared to associate with the camp's "disturbing element." Considered an "extreme social democrat and a bitter anti-militarist", Matheson considered that Mumme encourage others to act against the camp's "best interests." Every member of the staff allegedly mistrusted him<sup>18</sup>.

In the days following the incident, the internees again attempted to contact the outside world independently of the authorities. They set six bottles adrift at three-daily intervals, containing messages intended for Winslow. In due course, a whisky bottle with wire around it attached to a short length of rope, a piece of red cloth stapled to the cork and another piece of red cloth inside it, drifted ashore at Petone. The message it contained asked that the American Representative urgently enquire into their situation and send help. It also asked that the Consul forward a report to the German Government and advised that "a commission is urgently needed." It was signed, "The Much-Ill-treated Prisoners, Somes Island, New Zealand." The finder duly handed it over to the military authorities, who obligingly forwarded it to Winslow<sup>19</sup>.

On 19 August Matheson issued orders to the internees holding everyone assembled in any given room to be responsible for any violence or crime committed in that room. The range of new rules included a reminder that anyone "resisting, offering violence, or failing to halt immediately" when ordered to do so by a guard, "may be shot"<sup>20</sup>.

Winslow visited the camp on 22 November, after first inspecting Motuihi Island Internment Camp and the small one at Fort Cautley, Devonport. While complaints at those places had been relatively minor, things were different on Somes. Somes then housed 287 internees, with another three at Porirua Mental Hospital. Winslow's perception of conditions on the island this time differed somewhat to those of his two previous visits. Things were not as they should be. In addition to significant complaints about food, especially a recent reduction in quantity and some variety (due to previous wastage, Matheson explained), Winslow also heard a different story regarding life on Somes to that learned during his previous visits. Complaints included claims of maltreatment during the first months of 1915, "none of which were mentioned to me during my (earlier) visits." Chapman later recorded that Winslow, in fact, had "insisted on not seeing all the men who complained". Instead he requested that all their complaints be made in writing<sup>21</sup>. Winslow's report suggests, therefore, that despite the bottle message, he may not have anticipated how much the situation had changed. It also suggests that Winslow disliked both direct interviews and personally making detailed enquiries.

Winslow put the reappearance of these complaints down to the reduction in the ration scale and the long confinement. Matheson admitted that some internees had been punished rather severely, but claimed this was necessary to keep order. Winslow felt there was "a different atmosphere about the camp than on former visits." Several prisoners said they had feared the actions of the Commandant if they complained, and this was "the reason why complaints were not made before"<sup>22</sup>.

Winslow also recorded that the internees were required to do between two and four hours fatigue work each week to keep the camp in order and to keep the island in a sanitary condition. Six regularly did carpentry work around the camp, when required, for 3/- per day. For exercise, all internees were required at certain hours to march around the island under escort. They could also undertake any other exercise they wished at any time between 6:00 am and 5:00-6:00 pm, including swimming on certain sections of beach<sup>23</sup>. Noticeably absent, however, was the other form of compulsory exercise practised on the island. The internees also presented Winslow with the requested bundle of letters and petitions, which he promptly handed to Matheson to send through "appropriate" channels.

On 23 December and then 9 January 1917 Winslow wrote to the Minister of Defence inquiring into the whereabouts of this material. On 2 January Matheson sent an eight-page report on the contents of the bundle to the Adjutant General, citing the arrival of a number of temporary prisoners and the departure of "the Dalmatians" as a key cause of the delay. In fact, in early December a party of forty-two adults and four children from Tahiti spent a few days in New Zealand awaiting a connecting passage to Australia. Certainly some of the men (38 were described as prisoners of war) were on *Somes* prior to sailing for Sydney on *SS Manuka* on 8 December 1916<sup>24</sup>. Thirteen Dalmatians were also on *Somes* in 1916. While two were regarded as pro-German, the remainder stayed aloof from the other internees and Matheson actively sought their release. Most were freed on 19 December 1916, while Mathew Ferri, a prominent member of the Dalmatian community, was released on parole on 22 December 1916<sup>25</sup>.

Whether or not the complaints given to Winslow were genuine, Matheson's response to his superiors was a series of character assassinations about those who complained. He described the "class of men who complain" as "low and repulsive with a strong aversion to paying proper respect to authority." He considered that occasional brawls between prisoners were worse than "the odd incidents between Guard and prisoners". Matheson took the interesting precaution of including extracts from seven letters written by internees to others - dated between May 1915 and June 1916 - expressing pleasant remarks about the camp<sup>26</sup>.

On 10 January Winslow contacted Fritz (Frederich) Schumacher, who then appeared to be the camp's spokesman. He advised that all communications had arrived and that he would appreciate an update on circumstances since his visit. Schumacher replied that Winslow's letter had created great interest amongst the squadleaders. They particularly wished to know if their petitions had been forwarded to Washington or what exactly their fate had been. He tactfully added that he could not send him a report on the camp as it would contain some criticism. Instead he asked that Winslow visit them again and devote a few hours to personal interviews with several of their spokesmen. He said a number of internees "craved the opportunity" to submit personal matters for his consideration<sup>27</sup>.

In his report on the camp, Winslow advised that all written complaints that had been submitted, had come through the Military Headquarters at Wellington. However, they were "not being forwarded, since they are very bulky and contain nothing of importance" other than covering the maltreatment of a few of the prisoners. He added that there seemed no doubt that the camp contained "quite a number of tough characters ... and (that) the feeling against the Commandant, Major Matheson, was strong on the part of many." He intended to visit the island again in February 1917 and to go into matters more fully then<sup>28</sup>. Despite this impending closer scrutiny, Matheson had evidently put his own case across well. In the meantime, in January 1917 a chance for German internees aged over 45 to return to Germany, effectively came and went. The New Zealand Government would not pay their repatriation costs and the matter was placed in

Winslow's hands. Eighteen of those eligible on *Somes*, refused to return to Germany and probably none went<sup>29</sup>.

Winslow's proposed February 1917 visit did not occur. The United States Government broke diplomatic relations with Germany on 3 February 1917, and then on 6 April, it declared war on Germany. Thus responsibility for the interests of internees fell to the Swiss Consul, W.H. Pugh, of Auckland.

Pugh's first visit to *Somes* took place on 12 July 1917, at which time the island housed 271 internees. His report - which contained considerably less detail than Winslow's - suggests that perhaps complaints were fewer (or less heeded), or that some problems were less evident. 'Work' still consisted of household and camp tasks, while 'exercise' was the activity that took place between the end of the domestic chores and dusk. A few internees had fishing permits, while others did woodwork, carving and painting. Pugh commented that "gardening did not appear to appeal to these prisoners and although there is a sports ground available it is not patronised to any great extent." Shortage of money and tobacco were amongst the problems Pugh noted.

Pugh considered that the internees were given every opportunity to converse with him, that the camp was healthy, and that food, accommodation and "lavatory arrangements" were essentially the same for both internees and guards. He understood that most internees were "of the working class" and the majority were without friends outside the camp<sup>30</sup>.

On the day of the visit, however, Edmund Diehl wrote to Sidney Nathan (who he assumed to have been the consul concerned) on behalf of the internees. He asked why they did not receive a reasonable forewarning of the visit as previously requested. As they learned of it at only 12:10 pm that day, it was impossible for them to draft their complaints, in triplicate as per regulations, especially given their English language difficulties. A New Zealand Government Representative evidently accompanied the Consul, causing Diehl to remark that it would be best for both parties if a "really

independent and unbiased subject of a neutral state, such as the Swiss Consul General for Australia," took over the task<sup>31</sup>.

One important step forward did occur soon after Winslow's last visit. On 19 December 1916, Matheson replied to a petition from Edward Diehl regarding rations, work and assistance that would be provided if internees received "some kind of remuneration." Acknowledging this as a problem, Matheson commented that American Consular Agents in Germany received funds from the British Government and Relief Associations, to assist with distress. However, German Relief Associations appeared to have overlooked New Zealand and had not been reminded of its internees<sup>32</sup>. Similarly, there were no Relief Societies in New Zealand for German Prisoners of War<sup>33</sup>. Matheson took advantage of the temporary presence in camp in 1916, of two German medical men from Samoa. These men were being repatriated to Germany, as required by international law, so he asked them to inform the German authorities of the financial condition of the internees.

As a result of this belated contact, in April 1917, about 22 destitute German internees, but not those of other nationalities, became the first to receive an allowance of 10 shillings (usually) per month from the German Government, and based on certain criteria. Other money came from private funds. Another 141 destitute Germans were added to the list on 1 January 1918<sup>34</sup>. Naturalised New Zealanders and those who had lived outside Germany for more than ten years without registering with a German consulate or serving on a German merchant ship, were ineligible. This created considerable ill-feeling amongst the rejected men, with the internee who created the list becoming the focus of their resentment<sup>35</sup>.

In September 1918, Karl Stanzar wrote on behalf of the Austro-Hungarian, Bulgarian and Turkish internees' Committee, to the Swedish Consul General in Sydney. He asked that a similar arrangement be made with their governments, stating that the Germans' health had improved "very considerably" since the introduction of their regular allowance<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Major Brunt to Director of Personal Services, 5/2/1919. AAAB 482/41h, Kloren, J. (NA)

- <sup>2</sup> *AJHR*, 1917, D-1. p. 45
- <sup>3</sup> W. Krausch and K. Fritz to Major Matheson, 17/7/1916. AAAB 482/39c, Krausch, W. (NA)
- <sup>4</sup> *AJHR*, 1919, H-33. p. 23
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 17
- <sup>6</sup> Alfred Kraut to the American Consul General, September 1916. AAAB 482/31a, Kraut, A. (NA)
- <sup>7</sup> Transcript of charge against Karl August Hugo Kosel, 17/8/1916. AAAB 482/51f, Kosel, K.A.H. (NA)
- <sup>8</sup> Edmund Diehl and about 131 other, to Justice Chapman, 3/4/1918, Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>9</sup> Speech from Major Matheson on Somes Island, 16/8/1916. MS Papers 2071 (WTU)
- <sup>10</sup> *AJHR*, 1919, H-33. p. 8-9
- <sup>11</sup> Transcript of charge against Karl August Hugo Kosel, 13-14/8/1916. AAAB 482/51f (NA).
- <sup>12</sup> A. Kraut to American Consul General, 24/9/1916. AAAB 482/31a (NA)
- <sup>13</sup> Report of Sergt. Major Wiseman and others, 31/1/1917. AAAB 482/31a (NA)
- <sup>14</sup> Transcript of conversation between Alfred Kraut and Major Matheson, 9/2/1917. AAAB 482/31a (NA)
- <sup>15</sup> *AJHR*, 1919, H-33. p. 9
- <sup>16</sup> EP 15/10/1914 6(9). Also No. 41674, Wahren, Private H.A. (Personnel Archive, NZDF)
- <sup>17</sup> Major Brunt to Director of Personal Services, 5/2/1919. AAAB 482/41h (NA)
- <sup>18</sup> Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 18/8/1916. AAAB 482/24o, Mumme, C. (NA)
- <sup>19</sup> W. Elder, The Wellington Woollen Mfg. Coy. Ltd., Petone, to Col. Gibbon, 23/8/1916. Also copy of the anonymous letter. AD 1/65/85 Anonymous Letter from Prisoners of War, Somes Island. (NA)
- <sup>20</sup> Orders of Major Matheson, Somes Island Internment Camp, 19/8/1916. AAAB 449/52a Complaints by POWs to American and Swiss Consuls. (NA)
- <sup>21</sup> *AJHR*, 1919, H-33. p. 3
- <sup>22</sup> American Consul General's Report on Prisoner of War Camps in New Zealand, 12/1/1917. G 41/24, Item 130/17 (NA)
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>24</sup> AAAB 478/1ad, Aliens Repatriated, December 1916.
- <sup>25</sup> Trlin. p. 122-5
- <sup>26</sup> Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 2/1/1916. AAAB 449/52a (NA)
- <sup>27</sup> A. A. Winslow to F. Schumacher, 10/1/1917. Fritz Schumacher to A.A. Winslow, 23/1/1917. AAAB 482/37b, Schumacher, F. (NA)
- <sup>28</sup> G 41/24, item 130/17 (NA)
- <sup>29</sup> EP 23/1/1917 7(8), 25/1/1917 6(6). Also Major Matheson to Chief of General Staff, 24/1/1917, AAAB 482/60q 603, Bornhold, A.M.A. (NA)
- <sup>30</sup> Report on Civil Camp by W.J. Pugh, Swiss Consul for New Zealand. AD 1 42/20, Inspection of POW Camps, July 1917. (NA)
- <sup>31</sup> E. Diehl to Sidney Nathan, Acting Swiss Consul, 12/7/1917, AD 42/20 (NA)
- <sup>32</sup> E. Diehl to Major Matheson, 7/12/1916, Major Matheson to E. Diehl, 19/12/1916. AAAB 449/52a, Complaints by POWs to American and Swiss Consuls. (NA)
- <sup>33</sup> Report of W.J. Pugh, Swiss Consul, on Somes Island Internment Camp, January 1918. AAAB 449/52a (NA)
- <sup>34</sup> *AJHR*, 1919, H-33. p. 2
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 12
- <sup>36</sup> K. Stanzar to Royal Swedish Consul General, 16/9/1918, AAAB 449/52a (NA)



(Above) The guards' tent camp in early 1916 shortly before construction began on two long narrow military barracks, or "hutments". The hutments, one each for the guards and the internees, were built in the space between the tents and the quarantine buildings. The camp lock-up is on the right. By late 1918, the view from this vantage point included a new cattle shed in the foreground and the YMCA building for the guards, immediately beyond the lock-up. Both were built for payment by the internees. The new hospital, part of the construction of which also involved paid internee labour, was built beyond the two-storied quarantine buildings. Soon after the war, another three full-length hutments and a half-length hutment were built for quarantine purposes. Part of one of these latter hutments (which came from Featherston Military Camp) survives, along with the "new" cattle shed and the hospital. (Photo: *Auckland Weekly News*, 20/4/1916, p. 40)

(Below) The original caption for this photo read: "Responsible for the good Government of the Internment Camp at Wellington: The Guard quartered at Somes Island, under the command of Major Matheson." Note the dog in the photo. Another rigidly posed group photo of the guard taken on another occasion, has a child sitting at Matheson's feet. (Photo: *Auckland Weekly News*, 20/4/1916, p. 40)



## IX

**Joosten and von Luckner**

Trouble simmered throughout the internment camp's entire existence. The guards, fed by British propaganda and a new-found sense of personal power, sometimes took punishments too far. Meanwhile, the internees, often shocked by the way such a distant war had personally effected them, seemed largely powerless to get attention from those who might assist them. At the same time, the belief that *Somes* was a virtual holiday resort meant that the public felt no sympathy for the internees. After all, they were clearly far better off than Allied prisoners cramped up and underfed in camps in Germany. At least they were, according to remarks that repeatedly appeared in newspapers. These are certainly supported by numerous remarks made by various politicians, private individuals and Defence Department staff that survive in the internees' personal files. That Germany's infrastructure was very heavily stressed by the war seldom entered the equation.

Free "enemy aliens" and in fact anyone who sympathised with the internees, risked public scrutiny, criticism and even internment themselves, if they dared showed their concern too openly. As a result, no-one established a local support group or extended the resources of an existing New Zealand group, to provide the internees with food parcels and other things likely to have improved their lot<sup>1</sup>. They did, however, receive parcels of Bible tracts from a Miss W. Wieneke of Wellington, which almost no-one read. The Secretary of the Propaganda Committee of Wellington's Theosophical Society also offered to help teach the internees "the wisdom and justice of their internment"<sup>2</sup>. Robert Hall, a would-be camp leader who was "of great assistance" to Matheson at the price of being ostracised by almost all internees, advised, though, that the class of men on *Somes* would not read such literature<sup>3</sup>.

Meanwhile, the American and Swiss Consuls seem to have achieved little, with at least one being decidedly less than helpful. It is hard not to consider them negligent in their duties. There are, however, strong grounds to consider that perhaps they willingly believed what Matheson and his superiors wanted them to believe. Doubtless their

irregular reports on the various camps occasionally kept Matheson and the guards on their toes. America's pro-British leanings and the fact that all the Swiss Consuls during this period were apparently New Zealanders, did not help this situation. The transition between consuls when the United States entered the war also caused problems. The Swiss Consul could not investigate matters that occurred before he became involved with the camps in March 1917. Eventually he ascertained from the American Consul General that the bundle of letters of complaint submitted by the internees in late 1916, had "received his attention"<sup>4</sup>. As the American Consul General's January 1917 Report attests, however, he had chosen to do nothing with them<sup>5</sup>.

The Australian-based Swedish Consul, who had responsibility for the non-German internees, appears never to have visited although one took an interest when these men reached Holdsworthy Internment Camp, Sydney, in 1919. Certainly, as at 20 May 1918, these men had yet to receive any official financial assistance<sup>6</sup>.

Despite repeated demands by internees that consuls inform Germany of their perceived plight, there is little evidence of concern for them by the German Government, at least until late in the war. Of course, letters that criticised the camp were routinely confiscated in New Zealand and relegated to the safety of each writer's personal file. Most evidence of concern comes through regular inquiries about individuals made by the London-based Prisoners of War Information Bureau. These inquiries, however, usually covered changed circumstances such as ill-health and clerical queries. Indicative of this is Matheson's earlier mentioned remark that German-prisoner of war aid agencies seemed to have forgotten New Zealand's internees.

An important transition in the standing and self-esteem of the internees took place in the spring and summer of 1917-18. Where previously Somes' internees consisted primarily of a disjointed collection of labourers and seamen, the internment of 40-year-old Karl Joosten during this time, also marked the arrival of an articulate, respected and most definitely defiant spokesman. The other part of this transition was the capture in September 1917 of Count Felix von Luckner, commander of the German raider *Seeadler*.

The arrest of Von Luckner, his navigating officer Lieutenant Carl Kircheiss, and four crew members, occurred at Wakaya Island, Fiji. The group had planned to steal a ship to replace their clipper, *Seeadler*, which had gone ashore on 2 August. As a result of their capture, fifty-eight crew members and prisoners of war remained stranded on Mopelia Island in the Society Islands. The six captives arrived in Auckland on 7 October, at a time when New Zealanders were dying *en masse* in France, particularly at Passchendaele. As a natural result, these “genuine” German combatants became a focus for the grieving nation’s anger. Initially hidden in the Devonport Detention Barracks, von Luckner and Kircheiss subsequently joined the first-class internees on Motuihi Island. The remaining four, two petty officers and two leading seamen, went to Wellington. There, while awaiting transfer to Somes, their guard, Lance Corporal O.A. Melville of the Military Police, acted upon instructions to befriend them. He supplied them with tobacco and cigarettes from his own money, ensuring also that they knew of his “generosity”<sup>7</sup>.

Ironically, while Matheson held so many ordinary internees with contempt, at least on 21 October 1917 - the day after they arrived in the island - he claimed to regard the *Seeadler* men differently. As Chief Petty Officer Heinrich Permien left the camp hospital after undergoing treatment for Rheumatics, Quartermaster Sergeant Robert Johnston grabbed his shoulder (the afflicted shoulder) from behind. Permien quickly broke free and pushed aside two other soldiers who attempted to grab his arms. At that moment Matheson appeared, demanding an explanation. In fact, Permien had been detained in the hospital talking to patients and Johnston’s instructions were merely to remove and warn him. Permien, who could not understand English, soon realised he was not the subject of Matheson’s anger. With Frank Meissner as interpreter, Matheson told Permien that he thought the matter was a misunderstanding and that it would not occur again. Surprisingly, Matheson also complimented Permien on the service he had already done for his country and said that he would have an easy, unmolested time on Somes. Reports by three internees dated 11 January 1918, two being *Seeadler* men, said that no-one had troubled Permien since. He had neither been punished nor asked to perform any fatigue work<sup>8</sup>.

Permien later told Justice Chapman that the camp was quite comfortable and that he got on “all right” with the camp authorities. He did no work and only supervised men<sup>9</sup>. It is possible, therefore, to wonder if Permien was amongst those Joosten strongly objected to in his evidence at the Chapman Inquiry. Joosten said some “German foremen”, who may have “ingratiated themselves” to the camp authorities, had “made themselves particularly obnoxious to their countrymen”<sup>10</sup>. In Permien’s case, however, the opposite means to the same possible end seemingly applied.

After the Permien incident, Matheson had Johnston informed of his “extreme annoyance” at “nearly having to apologise to the enemy.” Johnston was relieved of duty within a week, “life on the Island (having been) made too uncomfortable for him.” This was not the first occasion he had “displayed tactlessness” when dealing with internees. Only days earlier, and with the “too excitable” Johnston as the main target, Matheson had lectured the NCO’s severely on the use of tact around the internees<sup>11</sup>. He reasoned that “one little indiscretion may cause no end of work and worry”<sup>12</sup>.

Leading Seaman Hermann Erdmann did not settle in well on *Somes*. On the day the *Seedler* men arrived, his “frivolous and objectionable behaviour” while on parade “incurred (Matheson’s) extreme displeasure.” Had his shipmate, Warrant Officer F. Ludemann, not intervened, Erdmann would have been punished. Matheson later complained that Erdmann soon began mixing with “the worst class of prisoner in camp,” men who deserted German for known and unknown reasons and who had become social outcasts in many countries. He said that on *Somes*, these men became known as “the black hand society” (after the Serbian movement), and that while they had succeeded with Erdmann, most other internees ignored their “evil methods”<sup>13</sup>.

On 29 November, in response to a request from von Luckner, the authorities permitted the transfer of Erdmann to *Motuihi*. Supposedly he was to act as von Luckner’s orderly and valet. However, in addition to being a highly trained gunner and signaller, Erdmann also looked English and spoke English flawlessly<sup>14</sup>. Von Luckner needed these traits more urgently than he needed those of a valet. Erdmann, on the other hand, was less enthused at the prospect. When told to pack his bags, he:

Stated emphatically he would rather submit to the discipline on Somes Island than the double discipline that would occur after the transfer. He particularly asked if he was compelled to go: also if the Count could legally claim control over him<sup>15</sup>.

Despite his less than enthusiastic comments, Erdmann clearly discussed Somes at length with his commander. For example, details of the Permien-Johnston altercation came to the fore because, on 11 December 1917, von Luckner wrote to the Governor General complaining of the attack. He wrongly alleged, though, that Permien had been locked up as a result. In a second letter he complained of other incidents involving internees, including the suicide attempt by future duel escapee Alfred Kraut, and the beating by guards of a man named Kroner (probably New Zealand-born G.W.F. Kroner<sup>16</sup>) during a visit by his wife<sup>17</sup>. Despite the possibility that these claims were exaggerated as the authorities claimed, the eventual consequence of von Luckner's complaints was the Royal Commission of Inquiry.

Von Luckner's famous escape attempt occurred two days after he wrote to the Governor General. When the two German officers arrived on Motuihi, they found some enterprising German naval cadets had an escape plan in preparation. The flamboyant count particularly suited the role of escape leader. As a result, at 6:00 pm on 13 December 1917, von Luckner, Kircheiss, Erdmann and others with the necessary seafaring skills escaped aboard Commandant Turner's launch, the *Pearl*.

While the escape attempt, which included the capture at sea of the scow *Moa*, lasted only eight days, the repercussions lasted somewhat longer. For example, on 19 January 1918, Somes inherited eight of von Luckner's crew, including Erdmann and a number of "Samoan" naval cadets and technicians. To their good fortune, these men, having successfully left New Zealand in the course of their escape, could no longer be punished as escapees. New Zealand was obliged to treat them as "freshly captured". In addition, despite their separate origins, all eight now classified themselves as crew members of S.M.H. *Seeadler*. On the other hand, they arrived on Somes having had all the buttons torn from their uniforms and many of their personal possessions enthusiastically "souvenired" by New Zealand's military forces<sup>18</sup>.

The von Luckner escape also caused Lieutenant-Colonel C.H. Turner, Motuihi's trustful commandant, to suffer Court Martial, while security tightened dramatically on both islands. Of particular concern to those with families was the ruling that internees could no longer receive visitors. In late March 1918 the Minister of Defence revoked this ruling, but restricted visitors to the wives and children (limited to one child per visit) of internees. The guards strictly scrutinised even these visits. De facto wives could not visit<sup>19</sup>. In addition, all but the most incapacitated of Somes' sick internees - who might otherwise have gone to the warmer Motuihi - continued to endure Somes if they had any nautical skills<sup>20</sup>.

On 7 January, as a result of a Cabinet decision that was almost certainly influenced by von Luckner's escape, the Government issued instructions for the internment of Karl Joosten, formerly Christchurch's German Consul. The same fate befell Joosten's Karori-based brother Henry, Jacques Schloss, a Wellington businessman, and Herman Zoeller, a Wellington commercial traveller<sup>21</sup>. Karl Joosten certainly had contact with the Somes internees prior to his internment. For example, in November 1916, he purchased from an internee a hand-made model of the ill-fated German raider *Emden*, complete with electrical fittings. The purchase, and an incident involving railway workers during its delivery, made the newspapers<sup>22</sup>. In April 1917 he also contributed £5/18/- toward funds being distributed amongst the internees<sup>23</sup>. In addition, he already knew some internees. These included the unpopular Robert Hall, whom he recognised from pre-war days as one E.R.R. Tamme. Joosten claimed that the mysterious Hall was implicated in a Melbourne murder<sup>24</sup>.

Joosten could see no obvious reason for his internment. He also condemned the actions of his captors following his arrest<sup>25</sup>. His first response, aboard the *Monowai* bound for Wellington, was to seek legal advice from the Solicitor General<sup>26</sup>. Joosten reached Somes on 12 January and, because of his background and his previous patronage of the camp, he soon took on a leadership and advisory role. A meeting of squad representatives requested that he do this, despite Camp Orders specifically forbidding united appeals to the Commandant. Previous attempts to establish such committees and an advocate in whom the internees had confidence, had allegedly seen anyone attempting

to do so branded an agitator, and persecuted whenever the camp authorities pleased. Matheson, it seems, preferred appointing squad leaders of his liking (such as Robert Hall<sup>27</sup>) and these people tended to be men in whom the squads had little confidence. A Cabinet decision also led to the internment of Eberhard Focke, formerly Wellington's German Consul, in May 1916<sup>28</sup>. He also played a very significant role on the island, where the authorities appear to have usually considered him trustworthy. He was, however, clearly subordinate to the outspoken Joosten in the eyes of many internees<sup>29</sup>.

W.J. Pugh paid an inspection visit to the internment camps in January 1918, with Somes' turn coming on Tuesday, 15 January. His brief report found conditions much as they were in July 1917, while several complaints were to be investigated. He also reported that no cases of distress amongst free German subjects had come to his notice. He added that New Zealand had no relief societies for German prisoners of war, although the Prisoners of War Relief Committee of New York, had sent £45 for distribution amongst interned seamen on the island<sup>30</sup>. In fact the German Government had supplied this money, which allowed another 141 German internees to start receiving money from 1 January 1918<sup>31</sup>.

Doubtless the complaints under investigation included the serious assault involving German poet-labourer, Paul Arnold. This incident, ironically, also occurred on 15 January<sup>32</sup> while Pugh was on Somes hearing individual complaints, the opportunity the internees sought for three years. Sergeant Reginald Laine later said that about forty or fifty internees showed a general disrespect toward camp management at the time of Pugh's visit, seemingly as part of a scheme to get as "close to the line as they dared". Arnold, however, had a good conduct sheet and although not a prominent member of the "discontented group", Laine considered that he was associated with them that day<sup>33</sup>.

Pugh learned of the incident almost immediately. Joosten, who was translating for him, begged him to investigate the matter straight away. However, after obtaining permission to see Arnold, on the second attempt, Pugh returned saying he could do nothing as the matter was *sub judice*. Joosten later complained that *sub judice* it remained, despite an Anglo-German agreement saying that no delay should take place in bringing prisoners to

trial. The Court of Inquiry was eventually held on 13 March. The first the internees knew of the result, though, came with Arnold's removal to prison on 20 March, ironically, the first day the Royal Commission of Inquiry<sup>34</sup>.

Pugh could hardly have ignored Arnold's beating. Indeed, on 21 January he wrote to Matheson asking after the two men who got into trouble during his visit (the other was George Borschel) and requested the results of the proposed Inquiry<sup>35</sup>. Furthermore, at least seven statements presented at the Chapman Inquiry are eyewitness accounts of it by internees. The detailed evidence of these men, who had either been at the latrine or working on the nearby YMCA billiard room building (for the guards), suggests Chapman could not ignore it either.

A consequence of refusing to say "Thank you Sir" to Matheson for passing him money received from the Germany Government, the incident, at the island's lock-up (the converted cattle stable), culminated in Arnold being knocked unconscious by a blow to the head from a bayonet handle. The various internees who witnessed the 4:30 pm incident claimed the screaming Arnold in fact had his arms outstretched in an attempt to defend himself from three guards, namely Sergeant Arthur Stevens, Lance Corporal Patrick Hannan and Private (later Lance Corporal) William Craig. However, while momentarily distracted, Arnold received Craig's final blow. The guards claimed that Arnold struck Hannan in the eye in the lock-up and had then grabbed Craig's bayonet from its scabbard and rushed outside. The three then overpowered him, with Craig cutting his hand while trying to retrieve the bayonet. Stevens claimed that had Craig not recovered the bayonet and not been in the way, he would have shot Arnold.

Arnold pleaded guilty to charges of having being disrespectful to a superior officer (Matheson) and of having used violence against a superior officer (Hannan). Furthermore, and despite Matheson's seemingly genuine expressions of concern, he chose not to call any witnesses at either the preliminary investigation held by Matheson on 18 January or at the main inquiry<sup>36</sup>. At the Inquiry, Arnold expressed regret at what had happened and said he had not felt well that day. He also thought other internees would hand out the money, due to its German origins. Although admitting striking

Hannan (who had ordered him to remove his boots), and also that the guards had not provoked him, Arnold said he did not intend to cause harm with the bayonet. Rather, his intention was to prevent it being used against him. He pointed out that he was a powerful man and could have easily done harm if he wished. In fact, at 6 feet 3 inches, Arnold towered over most internees and guards. Internees who saw Arnold in the weeks following the incident, thought the blows, which left two 3-inch long scalp wounds, had effected him mentally<sup>37</sup>.

As Arnold provided no significant defence, his guilty plea was treated very harshly. Rather than treating the snatching of the bayonet as a form of self defence, supported by many apparent eye witnesses, it was viewed as an unprovoked attack that was little short of murder, which, in turn, was punishable by immediate death. While the Inquiry found that there was no point in pursuing the insult against Matheson, it also found the second charge of assault involving the guards to be very serious and with the potential to have ended in serious bloodshed. In part this was due to evidence that some internees were - and had remained - of a mutinous disposition. The Court of Inquiry, therefore, recommended that Arnold:

Be imprisoned with hard labour for a period of years, both as a punishment for the crime which he committed and as a deterrent to other prisoners of war.

The Government then approved his imprisonment for twelve months, with a review after six months if his conduct was satisfactory<sup>38</sup>.

Arnold's sentence at Terrace Prison lasted from 20 March to 6 December. Interestingly, he was not regarded as an ordinary prisoner there. Rather he was "merely detained at the request of the Defence Authorities." As a result, and despite the recommendation of hard labour, he was neither employed there, nor "given marks." The prison authorities did, however, describe his conduct as "exemplary" and had no complaints to make about him whatsoever<sup>39</sup>. Furthermore, the failure of the Prisoners of War Information Bureau in London to inquire into the non-completion of a certain form, when they did so for another similar case, was in mid-1919 interpreted as meaning they were perhaps unaware that he had been imprisoned<sup>40</sup>.

Other factors clearly influenced Arnold's fate, doubtless including the direct involvement of both Pugh and Chapman. Matheson also mentioned the potentially mutinous internees and that a light sentence for a similar offence shortly beforehand had not had any deterrent effect<sup>41</sup>. No-one at the Inquiry even mentioned the injuries Arnold suffered. Neither, therefore, was any comment made by the "plaintiffs" or the investigators regarding the likelihood - as the internees believed - that Arnold may have been effected mentally by the blows. This possible brain injury may, therefore, have influenced his decision not to defend himself. It seems likely that excessive damage inflicted upon Arnold at such a potentially hazardous time (that is, during a neutral consul's inspection visit), was discreetly covered up. After all, there are realistic grounds to believe that the New Zealand Government would quickly deduce that if Germany learned of such an incident, New Zealanders in German hands might themselves suffer the retribution. Pugh's personal loyalties, as an apparent New Zealander, would also have been seriously tested. Meanwhile, if the incident was specifically planned by the internees to create an embarrassment for the authorities, then whatever the price, it certainly worked.

Matheson's superiors deserved blame for much of the trouble that occurred on the island. Soldiers at the Front at least between battles obtained some respite from their highly traumatic situation. Matheson, however, clearly contended alone with too much tension and too much responsibility for far too long. Assistant Commandant Rogers left his duties, with Matheson's rather too obvious blessing<sup>42</sup>, on 30 April 1915. Thereafter, until 1918, Matheson was the only officer on the island. The von Luckner escape revealed the consequences of this dilemma on both Somes and Motuihi. Major Osburne-Lilly, the Director of Personal Services and the man to whom Matheson was responsible, explained the situation to the Adjutant General on 15 January 1918 (The date of the Arnold incident):

The Commander of both these Islands is the only officer on the Island. He has to live alone and mess alone; the consequence is that he is just as much interned as any of the prisoners of war on the Island.

Osburne-Lilly wanted assistants appointed to both camps so that in the event of illness or the Commandant being urgently needed elsewhere, someone familiar with the camp could immediately take his place. While Motuihi had its own problems, the mere number of internees on Somes, Osburne-Lilly considered, warranted an assistant there<sup>43</sup>.

As a result, on 19 March Lieutenant Alexander Douglas Jack became Matheson's new assistant. Jack's Front Line service amounted to just three days in the Dardenelles in August 1915. On the third day (10 August) a gunshot wound in the upper arm and medical complications, including back pain, caused his return to New Zealand a year later. Between January 1917 and his appointment to Somes, he served as Area Officer at Taumarunui. At the end of a six week probation period, Matheson asked that his appointment become permanent<sup>44</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Report of Civil Camp by W.J. Pugh, Swiss Consul in New Zealand, Somes Island, January 1918.

AAAB 449/52a, Complaints by POWs to American and Swiss Consuls. (NA)

<sup>2</sup> W. Wieneke to O/C, Defence Dept., 22/4/1915, 2/7/1915. Mrs E. Duncan, Theosophical Soc., Wgtn., to Minister of Defence, 12/5/1915, 22/5/1915. Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 16/6/1915. AD 1 51/324, Literature for POWs. (NA)

<sup>3</sup> Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 16/6/1915. AD 1 51/324 (NA). R. Hall (a.k.a. Tamme) to The Commandant, 25/6/1915. Brig. Gen. G.S. Richardson to J.D. Gray, 4/2/1920. AAAB 482/2a, Tamme, E.R.R. (NA)

<sup>4</sup> W.J. Pugh to Ernst Dorn, Prisoner of War, Motuihi Island, 25/1/1918. AAAB 482/42L, Permien, H. (NA)

<sup>5</sup> American Consul General's Report of Prisoner of War Camps in New Zealand, 12/1/1917. G 41/24 item 130/17 (NA)

<sup>6</sup> *AJHR* 1919, H-33. p. 2

<sup>7</sup> L/Cpl. O.A. Melville to Assistant Provost Marshall, Auckland. 26/3/1918. AAAB 482/42L, Permien, H. (NA)

<sup>8</sup> Report to Major Matheson on Permien v Q.M.S. Johnston's Case, 11/1/1919 (but should be 1/11/1918). AAAB 482/41k, Kruse, H. Also Frank Meissner to Major Matheson, 11/1/1918. AAAB 482/42c, Meissener, F. (NA)

<sup>9</sup> *AJHR*, 1919, H-33. p. 4

<sup>10</sup> K. Joosten to Justice Chapman, 26/3/1918. Micro MS-18 (WTU)

<sup>11</sup> Extract of Report of Commandant, Somes Island, 6/2/1918 (regarding an incident on 19/10/1917). AAAB 482/69e, Ludwig, G. (NA)

<sup>12</sup> Sgt. R. Laine to Commandant, Somes Island, 11/1/1918. AAAB 482/42L (NA)

<sup>13</sup> Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 13/1/1918. AAAB 482/43c, Erdmann, H. (NA)

<sup>14</sup> Vaughan Yarwood, 'Break-out: The saga of the German "Sea Devil"', in *New Zealand Geographic*, No. 35 July-September 1997. p. 99.

<sup>15</sup> Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 13/1/1918. AAAB 482/43c (NA)

<sup>16</sup> *AJHR*, 1919, H-33. p. 9

<sup>17</sup> Count von Luckner to Governor General, (two letters both dated) 11/12/1917. AAAB 482/43c (NA)

<sup>18</sup> Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 19/1/1918. John W. Salmond, Solicitor General, to Chief of General Staff, 6/2/1918. Walther von Zatorski and 7 others to W.J. Pugh, 14/3/1918. AAAB 482/43c, Erdmann, H. Also AAAB 482/3c, Gruen, K. (NA)

<sup>19</sup> Col. R.M. Tate to Minister of Defence, 28/2/1918. Major-General Gibbon to Minister of Defence, 27/3/1918, endorsed by Sir James Allen, 28/3/1918. AD 1 42/66, Visitors to POW Camps. (NA)

<sup>20</sup> Major Osburne-Lilly to D.G.M.S., 12/7/1918. AAAB 482/37c Sonnenberg, G. (NA)

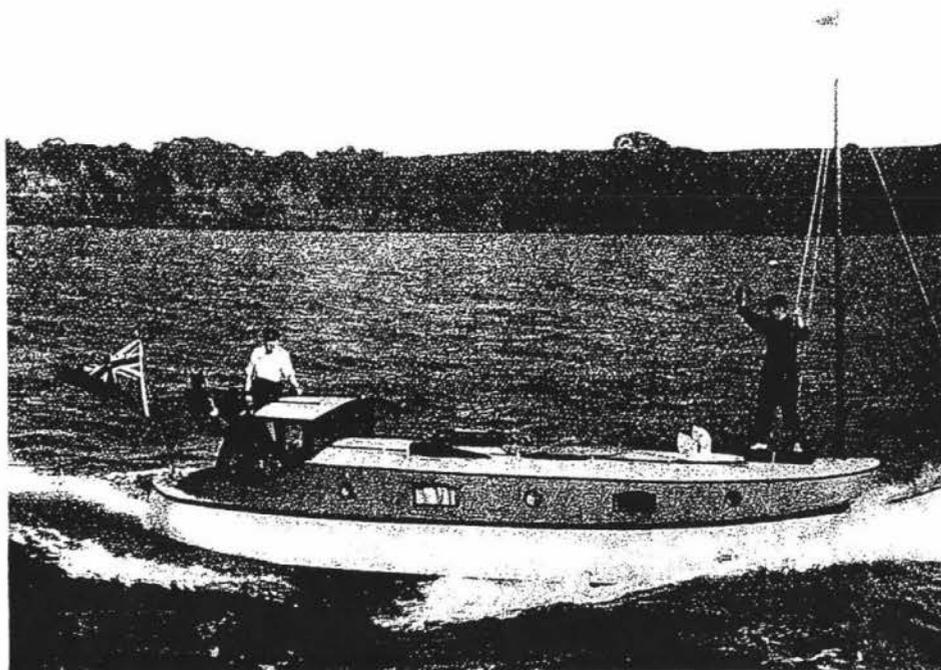
<sup>21</sup> EP 12/1/1918 8(9)

<sup>22</sup> Police Reports on the model of the *Emden* sent to Karl Joosten, 5/12/1916. AAAB 482/70I Reuter, K. (NA)

<sup>23</sup> Payments received by internees, 3/4/1917. AAAB 482/1j Schneider (Schader), E. (NA)

<sup>24</sup> Police Report of Detective Martin Carney, Wellington, 11/12/1918. AAAB 482/2a Tamme, E.R.R. (NA)

- <sup>25</sup> K. Joosten to Justice Chapman, 26/3/1918. Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>26</sup> K. Joosten to Solicitor General 11/1/1918. Solicitor General to Major Osburne-Lilly, 15/1/1918, John W. Salmond, Solicitor General, to K. Joosten, 15/1/1918. AAAB 482/57a. (NA)
- <sup>27</sup> K. Joosten to Justice Chapman, 26/3/1918. Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>28</sup> *NZPD*, 1916, Vol. 175. p. 223 (dated 18 May). Also list of admissions dated 19 May 1916 in AAAB 482/24o Mumme, C., and Major Matheson to Director of Personal Services, 1/12/1918, containing Matheson's recommendations for disposal of internees. (NA)
- <sup>29</sup> Justice Chapman to Sir James Allen, 7/6/1918. Micro MS-18. (WTU)
- <sup>30</sup> Report on Civil Camp by W.J. Pugh, Swiss Consul in New Zealand, Somes Island, January 1918. AAAB 449/52a (NA)
- <sup>31</sup> *AJHR*, 1919, H-33. p. 2
- <sup>32</sup> Note: The internees later erroneously used the date 16 January.
- <sup>33</sup> Court of Inquiry Report, 13/3/1918. AAAB 482/32e, Arnold, P. (NA)
- <sup>34</sup> K. Joosten to Justice Chapman, 12/5/1918. Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>35</sup> W.J. Pugh to Major Matheson, 21/1/1918. AAAB 482/32e (NA)
- <sup>36</sup> See both reports in AAAB 482/32e. (NA)
- <sup>37</sup> Statements presented to Justice Chapman in 1918 by Wilhelm Knab, Ferdinand Ewart, Georg Johannsen & Wilhelm Losche, Wilhelm Otteng (who reported the matter to the Consul), Richard Rast, O. Thiel, and Karl Joosten, 12/5/1918. Micro MS-18 (WTU)
- <sup>38</sup> Major Osburne-Lilly to Adjutant General, 28/11/1918. AAAB 482/32e (NA)
- <sup>39</sup> C.A. Matthews, Permanent Head of Prisons Dept., Wgtn, to Director of Personal Services, 9/10/1918. AAAB 482/32e (NA)
- <sup>40</sup> Major Brunt to Assistant Adjutant General, 11/7/1919. AAAB 482/32e (NA)
- <sup>41</sup> Court of Inquiry in Paul Arnold, held 13/3/1918. AAAB 482/32a (NA)
- <sup>42</sup> For examples see Rogers' own memoirs (MS-Papers-5553-1, Letters, Rogers, S.D. [WTU]) and letters in AAAB 482/69c, Schwachlberg (Schwichtenberg), O. (NA) relating to £5 that allegedly went missing from a letter to Schwichtenberg's wife in England. (re Capt. P.W. Skelley for A.G., to Major Matheson, 31/12/1915). A letter dated 26/4/1915 from Matheson in Rogers' file at the Personnel Archive, NZDF, (No. 25/6) Matheson advises simply that he had no objection to Rogers joining the NZEF.
- <sup>43</sup> Major Osburne-Lilly to Adjutant General, 15/1/1918. Endorsed in agreement with his views by Col. R.W. Tate (17/1/1918) and Major-General A.W. Robin (17/1/1918). No. 7118, Matheson (Personnel Archive, NZDF)
- <sup>44</sup> Various material relating to Jack's war service and appointment to Somes in No. 12/2339, Jack, Lieut. A.D. (Personnel Archive, NZDF)



In late 1917 and early 1918, the repercussions of this cheery scene caused - amongst other things - a Court Martial, the tightening of security and the cessation of visiting by internees' families to both Somes and Motuihi. This historic photo shows the launch *Pearl* under the command of Count Felix von Luckner (middle figure at stern), with the distinctive body shape of Lieutenant Kirchiess (in white) behind him. While the photo is well-used in relation to von Luckner's escape, the fact that it **IS** the escape seems to have eluded historians. At least one man on Motuihi, former Somes internee Walter Volkmer, possessed the equipment and knowledge to take and develop photos. Volkmer was formerly a photo engraver for the *New Zealand Herald*. Von Luckner eventually forwarded the photo to the *Pearl's* manufacturer with a letter extolling the launch's virtues. The *Auckland Weekly News* subsequently published both. The launch sank while under tow behind the *Moa*, the scow the escapees' captured at sea. All aboard the launch, except for von Luckner and Kirchiess, ended up on Somes. The two officers spent some months on Ripapa Island, Lyttelton, before being moved back to Motuihi. (Photo: *Auckland Weekly News*, 29/5/1919, p. 42)

## The Chapman Inquiry

Correspondence between the New Zealand Government and Swiss Consul Pugh, combined with von Luckner's complaints to the Governor General of 11 December, led the Government to decide itself to institute an inquiry, by Royal Commission, into the allegations of ill-treatment on Somes<sup>1</sup>. As a result, on 12 March 1918 Justice (later Sir) Frederick Revans Chapman received the task. Being fluent in German, French and Italian, Chapman made a good choice for this role. In addition to an ethnically German son-in-law, albeit American-born, he had also sympathetically conducted the Rottmann triple-murder trial in February 1915. The deaths of his two sons had, however, profoundly affected him, one being killed in the war in 1915. The other committed suicide in 1916<sup>2</sup>.

In addition, Chapman conducted the controversial trial of Maori prophet, Rua Kenana in 1916 - Chapman's most notable case - where his apparent lack of impartiality (against Rua) led to ongoing criticism. The police invasion of Rua's community at Maungapohatu in April 1916, which resulted in the deaths of two community members and a policeman, aimed to arrest Rua on somewhat dubious charges. Police Commissioner John Cullen, whose career included planning the arrests of Somes' first internees, led the attack. Later, as Alien Commissioner, he also orchestrated the internment of any Dalmatians who irritated him. Most significant to the Somes Island situation, though, was Justice Chapman's view that he found it "unthinkable" that the police could have "acted like the German soldiers in Belgium," as they subsequently rifled their way through the defeated community's valuables. Despite the evidence of many villagers, "he concluded that no evidence was sustainable against the police; instead it was all a Maori conspiracy"<sup>3</sup>.

Chapman heard 113 witnesses over 22 days on Somes, with several more spent in Wellington on related matters. This was despite having understood the whole inquiry would take two or three days. Compiling the resulting report also took considerable time and he commented that the quantity of material placed before him, "much of it

trivial and some of it irrelevant,” proved “very embarrassing”<sup>4</sup>. The end result, dated 7 June 1918 and published in the *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, is 27 pages long.

In addition, finally having the long awaited inquiry underway did not prevent further protest by the internees. On 18 April 1918, Frederick Rediger spoke to Matheson on behalf of the camp’s squad leaders. Karl Joosten assisted as interpreter and spokesman, while Matheson arranged for other English-speaking internees (Focke, Kessler, Duerkop and Ellis) to be present in case of “misunderstandings”. Rediger said the men considered that the German Government would not want them to work, except voluntarily or on chores relating to sanitation. They wanted to end the compulsory work required of them for the previous two and a half years. They also wished to know the New Zealand Government’s attitude toward points raised on the subject in the German Government’s Note Verbale of 26 October 1917, which stated that civilian internees could not work outside internment camps.

Most generously, Rediger suggested that perhaps the matter had not previously come before the Government, or that the Government had given it insufficient consideration. In fact, Justice Chapman’s subsequent communications with the Government suggest that it knew little about the document. Rediger said the men would continue working under protest, but would claim compensation. They had become very impatient and wished to make it clear that if they received no answer within a reasonable time, then they would go to a neutral consul.

Matheson replied that the Royal Commission would deal with the question of work by internees, adding that he had to ensure that he did not interfere with the work of the Commission. He also questioned the internees’ translation of the Note Verbale as “out-door work” in contrast with the Swiss Consul’s translation as “work outside the Camp.” Matheson considered it his duty to carry on his usual practice and that it was the internees’ duty to go quietly about theirs. He trusted that the Royal Commission would report to the Government, which in turn would rectify “any obvious wrong”, as well as considering the recommendations of the Swiss Consul.

A relatively subdued Matheson said he considered the internees were right to call the attention of his superiors to the Note Verbale. He also intended to do so, adding that:

Irrespective of any outside factor, the work has reached an easy stage; all road work being practically finished, and all the hard digging of gardens complete. I do not think there is any need of breaking up any new work.

He said he intended to do everything in his power to avoid any fresh trouble, and questioned the ultimate result of commencing a set of “fresh bickerings” while awaiting the Royal Commission’s decision. No good would result, he thought, only much trouble. He also expressed hope that the Commission would “heal old sores.” Bernard Ellis asked if it might not be “graceful” to cease working pending the decision, but Matheson said that it could not stop due to the work’s advanced stage. He would consider reducing the work, however. The next day he informed Focke, Joosten and Ellis that the number of men employed on fatigue would be reduced by half, “so as to eliminate all causes of dissension under that head, pending a decision.”<sup>5</sup>

The *Feilding Star* frequently published opinionated and invariably negative details of activities on Somes. Indeed, it treated New Zealand’s and its home district’s other Germans with the same contempt. Its part-owner, Fred Pirani, noted as a “staunch educationalist”, was formerly Palmerston North’s Member of Parliament and was a long-time chairman of the Wanganui Education Board<sup>6</sup>. This Board in turn was the former employer of both Major Matheson and his immediate superior, Major Osburne-Lilly, the Director of Personal Services<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, Fred Pirani was almost certainly a close relative (probably the father<sup>8</sup>) of Lieutenant Pirani who was on Somes in 1914. The Feilding-Somes connection was further cemented by Alice Matheson (née Fergusson), the Major’s wife, being a member of a family from the Halcombe area<sup>9</sup>. As such, on 4 May 1918, the *Feilding Star* enthusiastically reported an alleged strike on Somes, noting that complaints to Justice Chapman, “were of the nature of a protest by certain of the prisoners complaining of physical ill-treatment and knocking about by certain of the guards.” In particular, two brothers (the Joostens) had insulted the patriotic feelings of the guards, who strongly resented this. As a result of undefined but related activities, on Thursday morning, 1 May, the internees refused to carry their

provisions from the wharf to the store houses. The boat returned to Wellington with the provisions still aboard<sup>10</sup>.

In a confidential letter to Sir James Allen on 7 June, the day he completed his report, Chapman remarked that he had dealt with some subjects “very imperfectly”. He also said that the “volume and variety of matter for investigation was so enormous that I found it bewildering.” He felt that for some of the “immense number of issues raised” he should have had a medical colleague, while others needed a soldier colleague, the latter being the most important:

The imperfections due to want of antecedent knowledge of military matters and not knowing what to ask for will probably be apparent in the Report. My fear is that while dealing with many topics I may have missed something despite my desire to deal with everything of importance.

Chapman said Karl Joosten, as camp spokesman, had stressed that the most serious grievance lay with the mere seven hours of compulsory work expected of each man each week. He added that the internees:

Had treasured up clippings from newspapers of speeches by Mr Massey, Mr Herdman and perhaps yourself (Sir James Allen) in which public men declared: “We cannot compel interned civilians to work”. Yet it is quite apparent that this was done. They further quote statements by English public men and the declaration of their own government on the subject.

Matheson had also told him that he long considered the internees would be more content if they received a little more pocket money<sup>11</sup>.

In addition to compulsory work by interned civilians, the twenty-three categories Chapman covered included alleged ill-treatment of prisoners, food, severity of disciplinary sentences, the demeanor of prisoners, physical exercises, medical needs, water supply, recreation and so on. He looked into claims of drunkenness by the guards and abuse of the internees by both the guards and Matheson.

The international law that dealt with prisoner of war camps, was the International Convention with respect to the Laws and Customs of War by Land, otherwise known as

the Hague Convention. The Convention dated to 1899, but was revised and renewed in 1907. Interestingly, it required that:

Prisoners of war must be humanely treated, protected from violence, not subject to reprisals, and supplied with reasonable nourishment as well as medical and sanitary facilities. They are regarded as in the power of the Government of the captors, and not in that of the captors themselves; their personal belongings (other than arms and military papers) remain their own; they may not be detained in a convict prison; the captor State may utilize their labour, except in the case of officers, with payment according to rank and ability, but they may not be engaged in excessive work or any tasks relating to military operations<sup>12</sup>.

Clauses 6 and 7 of the 1899 document (which evidence suggests were not altered) required that work done by prisoners for the captor State, must be paid for at the same rates as if personnel from that State's national army did the same work. The sum paid was to contribute toward making the prisoner's life more comfortable, with any surplus handed over at time of liberation less any costs for upkeep. The captor State was, however, responsible for the prisoner's maintenance, with food, bed and clothing being required to be the same as that of the army of the captor State<sup>13</sup>.

Despite Chapman's constant belief that the internees exaggerated their evidence, he still found that the camp was not run at all satisfactorily. Guidelines that should have been clearly laid down from the start, had not been established. These included the need to obey existing New Zealand legislation regarding hearings conducted into alleged offences by civilian prisoners. In addition, while Chapman considered the extensive list of charges against Matheson to be "not proved," he did consider him probably responsible for the "rough handling" of men. That many of Matheson's former staff who might have given evidence on his behalf, were overseas, created this indecision. Even so, from his observations, Chapman did not consider Matheson the "malevolent character" implied in the accusations. Rather than a "spirit of wanton cruelty" who was "naturally disposed to ill-treat men", Chapman found that he had in fact done everything he could to preserve the health, comfort and well-being of the men in his care. Matheson stated repeatedly that he performed the same physical drill that he inflicted upon internees as a punishment. Even Chapman considered the exercises described would be perfectly reasonable for school boys<sup>14</sup>. Of course these men were no longer meek school boys.

Notable amongst the actions that attracted more than their apparent share of trouble were the punishments for repeated refusals or omissions to call Matheson "Sir". Matheson claimed that he refused to accept less respect from the internees than he did from his own men, and Chapman agreed with him on this matter. However, witnesses said the problem often occurred because internees, "did not know when to say 'Sir', and when it was or was not necessary to repeat it." They also claimed, "they never knew when they were incurring punishment until it came." The internees also thought the resulting punishments were too severe. Chapman considered:

The fact that men long retain a sense of soreness after the punishment is over may indicate want of tact in administering it, or it may represent a national peculiarity with which I am not familiar<sup>15</sup>.

Many internee statements described ill-treatment by the guards when inflicting disciplinary punishments, with a great deal being said on the 1915 escape by Wolf and Bilke. Unfortunately only three or four of the accused guards were still on the island and they denied the charges against themselves. Chapman, meanwhile, would not hear evidence against former guards who were not available to defend themselves. He considered also that each charge would require almost a separate trial. However, "The general impression left on my mind is that there has been some ill-treatment, or, at any rate, rough handling." He found that the greatest difficulty involved with these accusations was "manifest exaggeration," but added, "that I do not think that the guards have been in all cases men of such character as to justify placing them in positions of responsibility"<sup>16</sup>.

One drunken sergeant provided Chapman with first-hand evidence of poor behaviour, when he answered a question during cross-examination (probably by Joosten who represented the internees) with "such grossly coarse language." Chapman concluded that this man was not someone likely to have the "degree of tact" needed to deal with men, "many of whom are above him in education and standing or in their ideas of propriety of life or conduct." Repeated evidence in camp records of drunkenness by guards, led Chapman to recommend that explicit and stringent rules be drawn up regarding alcohol. These included absolutely forbidding it from the island<sup>17</sup>.

Chapman noted that the internees considered it standard procedure on Somes for “subordinate officers, and perhaps even private soldiers” to inflict sentences of fatigue without authority. Matheson explained that in the case of misconduct deserving of light punishment, the sergeant giving the order would give the internee the option of submitting and joining the fatigue party. If the internee chose that option, the order was treated as confirmed. If the man did not consider himself guilty, he instead appeared before Matheson in the evening. Chapman, however, found this practice:

Highly objectionable. These men are foreigners. Some of them understand English very imperfectly. The sergeant appears to pronounce a sentence, and the man may assume that the sergeant has the authority to do so.

Chapman felt he could not assume that an internee might view an apparent sentence, as being merely a possibility that the internee might be sentenced. He also considered that the sergeants should have known they could not sentence prisoners. Furthermore:

The Commandant ought to have seen that this mode of procedure was highly objectionable, and that the confirmation of an order already given is equivalent to sentencing a man without giving him a hearing. The Commandant knew that under the *King's Regulations* nobody but himself had the power to inflict a sentence.<sup>18</sup>

Chapman added that he felt Matheson did not realise that even these “trifling offences” called for strict legal procedure. This procedure included the need for a competent tribunal, no prejudgement and the opportunity for the accused to be heard. The sentence must also be given in Matheson’s presence. While Chapman could not determine whether previous punishments had been wrongly inflicted, he considered that a strong sense of injustice had resulted. This, in turn, led internees to believe Matheson had handed over the administration of punishment to subordinates, some of whom might not have been fit people to deal with such matters. Chapman thought this practice had probably grown slowly without its “evils being noticed”, but that it had become a serious cause of irritation and discontent. He added:

It is alleged that the matter has gone further than this, and not merely sentences of fatigue but sentences of detention have been dealt with the same way.

While considering that detailed minutes of orderly-room charges suggested fair trials, Chapman noted that the internees denied this. While these minutes were more detailed

than those kept by Justices of the Peace, he cautioned that the latter proceedings were held in open Court in front of the Press and public. On *Somes*, though, charges were held - apparently in military fashion - in front of only the guards. Chapman recommended that rules be drawn up to suit civilian prisoners of war and that one or two other internees who had the confidence of their fellows, attend every hearing. Chapman also enquired into record-keeping relating to these offences, and remarked that he was not confident that these sentences, considered trifling matters, were - as claimed - regularly recorded on each man's file. No matter how small the offence, Chapman considered that the punishment should be recorded, "and not merely entered on the prisoner's file, and every conviction should be reported to headquarters"<sup>19</sup>.

Matheson admitted at the Inquiry to his actions on 16 August 1916 regarding the "Kaiser Rede" address. Explaining the deep offence the internees had felt at Matheson's remarks, Chapman remarked that he did not need to:

Consider Major Matheson's excuse for addressing the prisoners. It is sufficient to say that from no point of view can this be justified, and this Major Matheson admits. The incident seems to have caused great offence and to have rankled in the minds of many hearers. This kind of thing coming from an officer whose duty it is to avoid everything tending to cause irritation is inexcusable, and it certainly tends to undermine the authority of an officer, whose conduct towards men in subordination to himself should always be dignified if he seeks to secure their respect. This kind of tactless conduct spreads downward by example. (He added that) I do not suppose that the use by subordinates of ill-bred and irritating expressions to prisoners of war in the detention camp can be altogether suppressed, especially as I can quite believe that coarse spirits among the prisoners are themselves guilty of provocative conduct, but the first duty of the Commander is to set a dignified example to his staff. That, in this instance, he has not done<sup>20</sup>.

After describing how the one of the internees had responded to this speech by composing a long set of verses ridiculing Matheson, Chapman remarked that the example Matheson "set to subordinates in delivering this speech was calculated to bring about a bad feeling between subordinates and prisoners of war"<sup>21</sup>.

Despite these things, the most serious finding to result from the Royal Commission was Chapman's confirmation that the work forced upon these men, without remuneration,

was far more than the “mere housework” permissible under international law. He itemised this work as:

1. Levelling ground about the camp to form a parade ground
2. Keeping this and all paths, yards, and approaches clean.
3. Bringing gravel up from the beach for this purpose.
4. Carrying up fresh water in buckets for the use of the establishment.
5. Handling provisions brought over by the tender for the use of the establishment, and bringing them up to the buildings.
6. Making a vegetable garden and tending it in order to produce vegetables for the use of the prisoners of war.
7. Making roads and some other work.

While there was no dispute over performing work associated with maintaining the health of the internees, this situation excluded the seven hours per week spent on other work. It was clear to Chapman that: “The men at Somes Island have been compelled to perform work which, as far as I can see, they ought not to have been compelled to do.” This work included roadmaking (except tracks made for their own use as a recreation ground), carrying provisions and water to the camp, and making and tending the vegetable garden. Chapman highlighted the fact that in Britain interned men were given work such as roadmaking. New Zealand public opinion, on the other hand, prevented enemy aliens from working in the public interest. In addition, New Zealand politicians had stated that interned civilians could not be compelled to work. British prisoners in Germany had usually absolutely refused to work. Even so, “that rule has not been adhered to in connection with this camp”<sup>22</sup>.

Chapman also obtained a report on Australia’s internment camps, and in particular Holdsworthy Internment Camp, at Liverpool, Sydney, which held five or six thousand internees. Most of these men were destitute like the majority of those on Somes. The report showed that Australia’s internees performed a large amount of “work” including bush-clearing and road-making, at a rate of only one shilling per day. However, the work was voluntary and the report’s author understood that internees valued this chance to earn money to pay for tobacco and small comforts. It also broke the monotony of life in the internment camp. In contrast to Somes, where purchasing handcrafts<sup>23</sup>, running the internees’ canteen for personal profit<sup>24</sup> and even borrowing money from internees<sup>25</sup> readily occurred, members of Australia’s guard could not trade, barter or conduct any

private or commercial transaction with the internees. Furthermore, Australian guards were strictly forbidden from even conversing with internees, while the only intoxicating liquor permitted in internment camps was for medical purposes<sup>26</sup>.

A particular recommendation Chapman made at the conclusion of his report was that a Visitation Board be established to deal with future problems on the island, and to generally liaise between internees, officers and guards. He suggested this board should include someone familiar with feeding, clothing and housing large bodies of men, and also an experienced Magistrate or former Magistrate. Lack of such a board, he felt, had been:

The main defect throughout the history of this camp. The Commandant has been too isolated and has had too much responsibility. He certainly had the right to resort to his superiors, but I do not think that that has sufficed in the case of dealing with such a large body of civilian prisoners, many of whom, or in the early stages were, prone to insubordination<sup>27</sup>.

Chapman also rather tellingly commented that the appointment of Lieutenant Jack during the sitting of the Commission, enabled Matheson to spend a night in his own home in Wellington for the first time since the von Luckner escape<sup>28</sup>.

In fact, it was Karl Joosten who suggested the regular visits by a Magistrate, believing that:

This would give us the assurance that we are not again to be placed at the mercy and good will or otherwise of a single person as has been the case in this camp for 3½ years<sup>29</sup>.

In his aforementioned confidential letter to Allen, Chapman cautioned that he suggested the Visitorial Board with some diffidence as he felt concern that such a board could cause some people, evidently people in the military, to fear that it might:

In some way clash with military ideas of military discipline. The prisoners however are civilians and that may make a difference.

It was his own experience in smoothing out certain minor matters on the island that led to this suggestion, and he felt it could be improved upon and perpetuated<sup>30</sup>.

Chapman concluded that in some cases of alleged ill-treatment, he found himself:

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Chapman concluded that in some cases of alleged ill-treatment, he found himself:

Forced to disregard direct evidence because I found myself unable to believe that the treatment has been truly represented. Another person with that same evidence before him in a written form might think that I was wrong.

He added that “Appellate Courts under our system of jurisprudence” place the highest importance on the opinions of judges who see the witness and observe his demeanour. However, the rehearing of a very old story caused “manifest signs of exaggeration” and had a very destructive effect on the evidence, something that was as familiar to juries as to judges. In most other matters he considered that he had had:

Imposed on (him) the unpleasant and, indeed, painful task of listening to a contest between men who throughout exhibited much bitterness towards each other, freely imputing bad faith and other offences. In my career I do not think I have ever seen so much evidence of bitterness and animosity.

Chapman felt he had done his best under the circumstances and that, while perhaps he may not have “produced any very definite result,” he hoped it may afford “some assistance in producing greater harmony at Somes Island”<sup>31</sup>.

On 17 June, Sir James Allen advised Chapman that the New Zealand Government was, at the direction of the Imperial Authorities, taking no action on Germany’s Note Verbale. Even so, it decided to contact Britain to see how it handled work issues in civilian internment camps and whether English practice forbade working civilian internees for an hour per day as compulsory physical exercise<sup>32</sup>. Although Britain’s reply is not amongst the documents resulting from the Inquiry, the *Evening Post* of 5 August reported its contents. Britain’s civilian internees, it said, “are not obliged to do any work other than fatigue duty connected with the camps, either for health reasons or otherwise”<sup>33</sup>.

There is no evidence that a Visitors Board was ever established and certainly subsequent remarks indicate that the internees saw neither Chapman’s report nor any clear evidence that it had improved their lot. Probably it opened the eyes of the authorities to various rather significant problems, but transformations occurred only slowly. A most notable discovery though was the cause of the island’s “appendicitis epidemic”. This had seen 19 operations over three years, eight months (including Karl Joosten), from an average of 240 internees. The appendix of the twentieth victim

proved - as previously suspected - to contain enamel grit from the camp's extremely chipped enamel cookware. The suspect pans, disposed of a fortnight previously, were duly followed by both the "appendicitis epidemic" and also a great deal of indigestion<sup>34</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *AJHR*, 1919, H-33, p. 3

<sup>2</sup> Peter Spiller, 'Frederick Revans Chapman, 1849-1936', in Department of Internal Affairs, *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, Vol. III, (Wellington, 1996). pp. 90-1.

<sup>3</sup> Judith Binney, Gillian Chaplin, Craig Wallace, *Mihaia, The Prophet Rua Kenana and His Community at Maungapohatu* (Auckland, 1987). pp. 118,123-7. Also Trlin pp. 115-128.

<sup>4</sup> *AJHR*, 1919, H-33, p. 3

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Frederick Rediger and others, by Major Matheson, 18/4/1918. AAAB 482 696 Rediger, F. (NA)

<sup>6</sup> ES 27/10/1926 9(1), G.H. Scholfield (ed.), *A Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (Wellington, 1940), pp. 168-9. See also EP 8/6/1918 6(7) which provides some biographical detail on Fred Pirani at this time.

<sup>7</sup> FS 26/3/1901 2(5), 14/6/1917 2(5). Also W.J. Lauridsen, *Linton, 1889-1989: A School and District Centennial History* (Palmerston North, 1989). pp. 42-3. Tiritea School Centennial Committee's *Tiritea School Centennial 1895-1995* (Palmerston North, 1995). pp. 8, 13-4.

<sup>8</sup> MDT 4/7/1917 4(7) The reference is to Fred Pirani's sons, Pvt. F.J.H. Pirani and Captain P. Pirani, who was then serving in the British Army. [Note: The only surviving copy of this edition is in Massey University Library]

<sup>9</sup> FS 23/12/1895 2(3). Also Personal Interview with Ian Matheson, Palmerston North, March 1999.

<sup>10</sup> FS 4/5/1918 3(1)

<sup>11</sup> Justice Chapman to Sir James Allen, 7/6/1918. Micro MS-18 (WTU)

<sup>12</sup> *Keesing's Treaties and Alliances of the World, A Survey of International Treaties in Force and Communities of States* (Keesing's Publications Ltd., Bristol, England, 1968). p.2

<sup>13</sup> *British and Foreign State Papers*, Vol. 91, 1898-1899. pp. 996

<sup>14</sup> *AJHR*, 1919, H-33. pp. 4-10, 14

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* p. 8, 13-4

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 16-7

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p. 15

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p. 15

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p. 18

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* p. 18

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* p. 11

<sup>23</sup> e.g. Private Greeney's 'purchase' of an inlaid box, 20/9/1918. AAAB 482/38b Hansen, H. (NA)

<sup>24</sup> *AJHR* 1919, H-33. p. 19

<sup>25</sup> e.g. Unpaid loans by Private Osborne (of SS *Janie Seddon*) and Private Blair (Somes Guard). AAAB 482/41h Kloren, J. Unpaid loan by Sergeant Trotter. AAAB 482/38a Hecht, E. (NA)

<sup>26</sup> Report - Internment Camps - Australia - by Sergeant-Major B.J. Morton, 28 February 1918. AD 1 39/360 (NA)

<sup>27</sup> *AJHR*, 1919, H-33, p. 26

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* p. 25

<sup>29</sup> K. Joosten to Justice Chapman, 26/3/1918. Micro MS-18 (WTU)

<sup>30</sup> Justice Chapman to Sir James Allen, 7/6/1918. Micro MS-18 (WTU)

<sup>31</sup> *AJHR*, 1919, H-33, pp. 26-7

<sup>32</sup> Justice Chapman to Minister of Defence, 16/5/1918 & 21/5/1918. Sir James Allen to Justice Chapman, 17/6/1918 and 18/6/1918. Micro MS-18 (WTU)

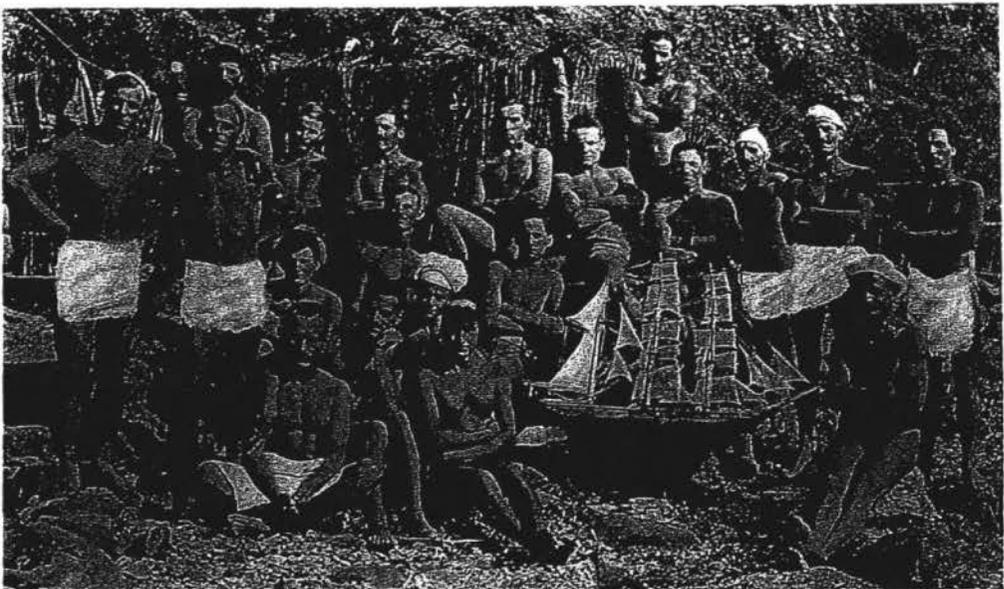
<sup>33</sup> EP 5/8/1918 4(6)

<sup>34</sup> Major Matheson to Medical Superintendent, Seacliffe Mental Hospital, 4/4/1918. A.C. McKillop, Seacliffe, to Major Matheson, 10/6/1918. Major Matheson to Justice Chapman, 14/6/1918. Micro MS-18 (WTU). Report of Col. W.E. Collins, D.G.M.S., 16/5/1918. AD 1 49/41, Medical Attendance, POW, Somes Island. (NA)



**(Above)** While New Zealand soldiers die in Europe and the country's newspapers swamp readers with wartime horror stories, the *Auckland Weekly News* entertains its readers with scenes of "enemy alien" internees enjoying themselves. This photo shows them taking their morning dip in the sea at the Somes Island "Holiday Camp." Mokopuna (then Leper) Island is in the background. (Photo: *Auckland Weekly News*, 20/4/1916, p. 44)

**(Below)** This "censored" photo of sunbathing internees relaxing on Somes, provides another perfect excuse for New Zealanders to condemn internees. While they enjoy the good life, their relatives butcher and maim in Europe. The internees seem unaware that the public might misinterpret their happy relaxed smiles and friendly demeanour. This photo appeared in at least two publications and caused one woman to write to the authorities thinking she recognised her missing husband. The man she identified proved to be August Never, a sailor from an American vessel, and neither married nor a former resident of New Zealand. The beautiful sailing ship is an example of the large range of handcrafts produced on the island. (Photo: *Auckland Weekly News*, 20/4/1916, p. 41)



## XI

**Scorched Earth**

Karl Joosten's letters to the Swiss Consul and Major Matheson's responses to them outline the key problems on *Somes* in the latter part of 1918. Unlike most other internees on *Somes*, neither Matheson nor his superiors could easily pretend that the intelligent and invariably defiant Joosten was not their social equal. Of the Swiss consuls, all of whom viewed (or came to view) Joosten as an irritant, only W.J. Pugh appears to have met him, and this event took place less than a week after Joosten's internment. While acknowledging the reality that Joosten might manipulate evidence to extract its greatest advantage, clearly the authorities also readily exercised their power to manipulate and undermine his complaints against them. They also omitted to forward his (and his successor's) letters to the consuls when it suited them. Furthermore, it is clear that Joosten, as a former representative of a large, important country, expected certain standards of assistance from the Swiss Consuls, and that often these standards were not delivered. Joosten's eventual replacement as Camp Spokesman, L.R. Eilender, formerly secretary to Auckland's German Consul, displayed the same impatient trait.

In a number of ways June 1918 became another transition point in the history of the camp. For example, that month the New Zealand Government revoked the naturalisations of twenty-six internees, under the Revocation of Naturalisation Act, 1917. Those effected, involving inmates at both internment camps, included the Joosten brothers and the former Wellington and Auckland consuls<sup>1</sup>. A cause of considerable indignation, the internees made full use of Parliament's temporary omission from the Act of a clause forcing denaturalised people to return their papers. As a result, many "misaid" these precious documents, while at least one (Gustav Kronfeld on *Motuihi*) had someone hide his<sup>2</sup>. As at 13 August 1919, twenty internees, including the Joostens and Eberhard Focke, were yet to direct the Department of Internal Affairs to their missing papers<sup>3</sup>. Eventually these men (and their families) were to face the reality that they were no longer subjects of any country<sup>4</sup>.

Joosten also discovered in June 1918, that future complaints by internees about work issues, were to be forwarded through the New Zealand Government instead of directly to the Swiss Consul. Joosten complained angrily:

It would seem to me to be a most extraordinary proceeding for us Interned Civilians and Combatants to have to address ourselves to the N.Z. Govt. which detains us, to transmit to our Government requests for redress of wrongs imposed upon us by that N.Z. Govt. itself. That would simply mean a neutralisation of the friendly Consular Service, nominally available to us, if extended to other possible complaints we may have to make<sup>5</sup>.

While almost certainly the New Zealand Government feared the implications of nearly four years spent breaking the Hague Convention, these instructions (more or less) came from the British Government. A response to alleged infractions by Germany, they required that censors in British countries subject to standard scrutiny all correspondence between German prisoners of war and the Legations and Consulates charged with their care<sup>6</sup>. Joosten, however, soon learned to write his letters to the consuls with the censor in mind. Doubtless he now realised that what he initially perceived as an irritation could instead be a most valuable means to reach the eyes of Matheson's superiors.

Writing to Pugh on 5 June 1918, Joosten commented that the Royal Commission started earlier than the internees anticipated. They had, however, submitted all their complaints for consideration. He added that the internees expected "drastic remedies" as a result of either Pugh's efforts or the Royal Commission<sup>7</sup>. On 6 July he again wrote, stating that the internees had heard nothing of the findings of the Royal Commission, despite its sittings having concluded over five weeks earlier<sup>8</sup>. Joosten also pointed out that Matheson's aforementioned promise to reduce imposed work had occurred, but claimed that now far fewer men shared the original workload<sup>9</sup>.

The water-carrying duty that plagued the camp for years, also ended in early June 1918 after the spouting on every building in the camp was somewhat belatedly overhauled and connected to the camp's large concrete water tanks. Enamel chips in the meals, therefore, were replaced by an apparently somewhat healthier diet of seagull droppings (from the roofs) in the rain water.

Chapman had recommended spending the estimated £100 to repair the camp's spouting to end the water-carrying problem. He remarked in his report: "I should give the same advice even if the cost was considerably to exceed £100"<sup>10</sup>. Plans were also afoot to ensure that water-carrying was not required again in summer. Germany's Note Verbale had, Matheson wrote in October, also ended General Fatigue. Gardening was no longer compulsory and the head gardener now received 3/- per day. The internees, though, showed no inclination to voluntarily undertake vegetable cultivation. Not surprisingly, a decline in the list of defaulters corresponded with the decline in forced work<sup>11</sup>.

Joosten and Matheson clashed many times, and their resulting collection of angry letters to Pugh and Osburne-Lilly, and the transcript of one charge Matheson heard against Joosten<sup>12</sup>, ensure no doubt exists as to Joosten's defiance and his contempt of justice as dispensed by someone he viewed as both his accuser and his judge. The first of two more serious clashes between the pair occurred on 16 July 1918, after Matheson informed Joosten that for various reasons he no longer recognised him as spokesman. Matheson claimed Joosten played with the internees' minds, "which have become narrow as regards common sense, during their long internment", and that the ideas he put forward on behalf of the squad leaders were mostly his own. He also claimed that Joosten used his former position as consul "in a spirit of mild intimidation to encourage prisoners to be in a state of unrest." Rather, Joosten probably provided a capable outlet for their many frustrated grievances.

On the evening in question, Joosten applied at the office for a Committee interview, only to be told that Matheson would see each man individually. As Joosten was not then a squad leader, Matheson refused to hear him on matters where he claimed - as if in his former role as consul - to represent his squad or the squad leaders. While leaving, Joosten attempted to speak with the men who were waiting to see Matheson, and this led to Lance Corporal Craig "hustling" him away. An NCO then ordered Joosten's arrest and his removal to the lock-up. Craig claimed that Joosten tried to hit him, although the complaint was eventually disproved. Matheson did, though, uphold the view that Joosten resisted the guard. Much of Joosten's subsequent complaint rested on the length of time he was detained while under arrest. He claimed he spent six days under house arrest,

while Matheson referred to "open arrest." Matheson also accepted Joosten's complaint against Craig of disrespectful language, adding that "the language complained of will not be tolerated by the commandant."

Joosten claimed the unidentified NCO was an excessive drinker who had been drinking that day and who evidently still suffered the after-effects<sup>13</sup>. Matheson, however, did not accept that the NCO was drunk. He said this man performed his duties under his eyes and that he would surely have noticed. He was absolutely sure the man was sober<sup>14</sup>. Probably this was Orderly Room Sergeant, Reginald Laine, who spent the war on the island and who certainly had a history of drinking problems<sup>15</sup>.

Doubtless the arrival at Motuihi on 28 July of two sick internees, Adolph Nawrath and William Manthei - the second such transfer within a fortnight<sup>16</sup> - provided Felix von Luckner with the "trustworthy" information that led him, on 29 July, to write once again to the Governor General. His stated intention was to protect his crew members on *Somes*, yet his concern focused directly upon Joosten. Von Luckner remarked on the "praiseworthy manner" in which Joosten supported "his untutored and suffering fellow-prisoners", only to himself be locked up in the old cattle stable that served as the camp prison. Von Luckner said that Matheson's order to imprison Joosten proved unlawful. It was, therefore, altered to six days' room arrest.

Von Luckner added that Joosten supported his fellow internees and was "much valued and respected by them." In contrast, Matheson had proved in this as in previous cases, "that his conduct is rarely influenced by justice and impartiality." The interned men instead viewed Matheson's treatment of Joosten as "an act of revenge of the most contemptible kind." The Count considered that the other internees, and in particular his own men, could easily have been driven to defend themselves. The matter he considered worse for the fact that Matheson acted while his Assistant was away (Lieutenant Jack still suffered from wartime injuries).

In addition, von Luckner claimed that Matheson had forced some educated men to write a certain sentence twelve times, "like stupid schoolboys", simply because they put muslin

curtains over their windows. Apparently Matheson had even closed a school, opened by the Joostens and others<sup>17</sup> - and approved of by Justice Chapman - when Chapman's return was no longer feared. Von Luckner scathingly wrote:

I am an officer, I know war and the customs of war; I know and recognise that strict discipline is necessary, but Some Island has a Commandant who ill-treats helpless prisoners, and torments them in an inhuman manner, such as by one who is mentally abnormal<sup>18</sup>.

On 31 July, Joosten again sought Pugh's help to make Matheson live up to his promises to Chapman. He also cited problems such as obtaining hot water for baths (a new boiler was on order) and coal for fires (evidently the first coal most internees ever received was in the winter of 1918). He also drew Pugh's attention to the surprising situation whereby a member of the camp's Guard, Sergeant Laine, had run the Camp Canteen for his own profit - charging "exorbitant prices" - since it first opened. The internees, Joosten said, had too little money available with which to augment their rations to have it spent this way. Another promise by Matheson was that he would permit the establishment of a self-elected Camp Committee and Spokesman. In addition, he had promised not to deduct letters to the Swiss Consul from the two private letters an internee could send each week. Matheson subsequently cancelled these promises.

Joosten wrote that he and the 21 squad leaders had discussed Matheson's recent refusal to have any dealings with himself and another Camp Committee member. However, as Matheson eventually refused recognition to every spokesman they had ever put forward, the squad leaders chose to retain Joosten as their representative. Joosten informed Pugh that the internees must, therefore, pass any future complaints to the New Zealand Government through Pugh, albeit in the knowledge that the authorities would read his letters. Further to the concern expressed to Chapman during the Inquiry that some guards habitually showed signs of drunkardness, he added that even Matheson had "at times behaved in such a manner that we fear his actions not to be those of a man in the full control of his senses." As a result, the internees feared that a drunken guard might imagine himself endangered and shoot someone while effected by "the hallucinations of a besotted mind"<sup>19</sup>.

Joosten also described his aforementioned speedy dismissal from his last interview with Matheson, and the subsequent "buffeting" he received from two guards when he reached the yard. He said the resulting inquiry lasted four nights, with all but the two guards concerned denying Joosten's guilt. In addition, he asked Pugh to check Paul Arnold, who was still imprisoned after his encounter with the guards the previous January. He pointed out that the guard who hit Arnold (Lance Corporal Craig) was the same one who insulted him during his aforementioned incident<sup>20</sup>. For all Joosten's efforts, it is probable that Pugh did not receive his letters of July 6th and 31st<sup>21</sup>.

By January 1918, at a time when Somes housed 284 internees, Matheson advised that existing conditions could accommodate only 290. He suggested transferring some men to Motuihi and placing them in tents if necessary. He considered that only limited space remained on Somes for tents - evidently some internees preferred tents - and suggested building a special barbed wire enclosure for these tents. With Motuihi under stress due to the recent von Luckner escape, the tent camp on Somes became the chosen option<sup>22</sup>.

The day after von Luckner wrote his stinging letter to the Governor General, these tents became the launch point for the camp's only tragic escape attempt. Just after 9:30 pm Roll Call on Tuesday, 30 July, three internees, William Knab, Alfred Kraut, and Carl Mertin slipped away from their tent to a raft they had made from three tea chests and five oil drums. At the last minute Kraut's friend, the asthmatic Hugo Kosel, who occupied another tent, also joined them. Kosel and another internee named Schwarz took responsibility for Kraut (who was interned at age 17), following the depressed 20-year-old's suicide attempt in January 1917, evidently after falling out with Schwarz<sup>23</sup>.

Provisioned with stores and spare clothing, the raft also carried a home-made sexton and two paddles and two spades for propulsion. The party set off at about 10:00 pm for a point between Petone and "Ngahauranga" (Ngauranga), only to find the current against them. Soon the raft began sinking and eventually it was under about 18 inches of water. The very cold and exhausted group staggered ashore at about 2:00 am. Kosel decided he could go no further and that he would go to the first house he saw. Knab, by then the strongest of the party, crossed the railway lines, and hailed a taxi. Pretending to be

shipwrecked sailors from a leaky boat, the three asked the driver for a lift to a Wellington boardinghouse. Once on Lambton Quay, the driver spoke to a policeman, who said to take them to the Police Station. At this point the escapees finally mentioned Kosel. The car returned to the scene to find Kosel lying dead on the beach with water splashing over him<sup>24</sup>.

On 5 August the *Manawatu Evening Standard's* Wellington correspondent wrote that "disagreeable rumours" were circulating about the escape. The public's general impression was that the internees had "a great deal too much liberty." Considering that many of them might be "unable to appreciate the spirit of the 'British way'," the correspondent felt that they regarded kindness and consideration - such as not being forced to work or being locked in barbed cells at night - as signs of weakness. The correspondent concluded that "probably a little severer discipline on the Island would produce a better atmosphere about the place."<sup>25</sup> Probably the internees would disagree. Meanwhile, the tent camp was dismantled and its occupants returned to the main buildings<sup>26</sup>.

Some other internees were very upset that Kosel's companions left him when he was obviously in distress<sup>27</sup>. The trio, however, said they understood he intended to go to a house and turn himself in. Kosel and Kraut had been friends - and partners in "crime" for two years - and it seems unlikely that Kraut would have left him had he known he was so ill. In a letter to a friend on Motuihi in 1919, Kraut wrote: "I suppose you read in the paper about Hugo. It was a sad finish, but as you know there never is an achievement without sacrifice"<sup>28</sup>. Four internees were permitted to go ashore to attend Kosel's funeral at Karori Cemetery<sup>29</sup>.

The Commission of Inquiry into the escape subsequently concluded that the sexton (Mertin's) was home-made, and that the island's telephone security system, which operated hourly at night, may have experienced a temporary defect. It commended Matheson on the great care and thoroughness, "without any regard to health or personal comfort", that he had shown during the proceedings. It also made recommendations that

led Sir James Allen (Acting Prime Minister) to consider that the island's accommodation was overtaxed<sup>30</sup>.

Only ten days after the July escape, another "escape" occurred. Soon after 2:00 am on Friday, 9 August - when Matheson personally did the rounds of the sleeping quarters - four more internees vanished. Despite informing the usual shore-based organisations, doubts remained that these men could have left the island. Nothing seemed amiss and the night had been "very tempestuous." As a result the guards thought that only a "staunch row boat" could have reached the shore. Had they used a weaker boat or swum, they would have drowned. Suspecting that the men - Charles Hadler, William Otteng (who had just attended Kosel's funeral), Paul Wolf (who swam ashore in 1915) and Kurt Robenstein (Albert Kraut's former shipmate) - might still be on the island, the guards systematically searched the many nooks and crannies on the island and its cliffs. As their non-appearance dragged on, a range of theories developed. The views that endured, though, were that the four were hiding on the island to stir up trouble for the Guard, or that they had drowned<sup>31</sup>.

On the day of the "escape", Peter Sulenta, a newly interned alleged "underhand Dalmatian agitator" (because he was a strike leader amongst Government-conscripted Dalmatian labourers)<sup>32</sup>, wrote a "strictly confidential" letter to Matheson. Being a member of the notorious Squad 12, and yet also a self-confessed friend to the British, Sulenta thought Matheson should know what he had heard. He said a few days earlier Hadler told him that he planned to run away with Wolf immediately after Matheson walked through their squad room. "Consul Usen" (Joosten) had evidently drawn up a plan and the escapees intended to take with them some documents they felt certain would see Matheson sacked. Sulenta said Hadler's diary recorded every speech Matheson had made and all the trials ever held there. The Consul's instructions were to see that the diary eventually got to Germany. Sulenta added that his squad mates kept him well away from the previous night's activities as they suspected him. Interestingly, he also said he would like all the Dalmatians in the same squad, complete with a good fireplace. In reality, Sulenta possibly played an important role in the "escape", albeit perhaps unwittingly<sup>33</sup>.

Rumours continued surrounding the possible means by which the escape occurred. However, suggesting that they may still be on the island was the curious situation where other internees “who would probably be ‘in the know’, are inclined to treat the whole occurrence as a joke, at the expense of the officers and guard.” Were the men genuinely at risk of death through a failed escape attempt, the *Evening Post* argued that at least some would have displayed anxiety<sup>34</sup>.

Finally, at 7:00 am on Monday, 12 August, the four suddenly reappeared within the barbed wire enclosure surrounding the building they had “escaped” from. The *Evening Post* remarked that this “decidedly uncomfortable practical joke” differed from the limited and “rather grim” sense of humour usually attributed to Germans at that time. The four shivering, “half starved” men explained that after Matheson’s early morning inspection, they decided to prove that an “escape” was possible. As a result, they lifted the floorboards beneath their bunks, squeezed through the gap and spent the whole time underneath the building. In addition to wearing merely warm, but not “special” clothing for this scheme, the men ate little or nothing during the entire time. In addition to their own discomfort, the remaining prisoners found themselves confined far more closely than usual, and facing more stringent restrictions in the future. Furthermore, “various favourite spots on the island, such as a series of hollowed dug-outs on a sunny face, where the prisoners passed leisure or study hours, have been placed out of bounds”<sup>35</sup>. Meanwhile the “escapees” joined the three previous escapees in Terrace Gaol<sup>36</sup>.

In fact, the guards destroyed the dug-outs and huts, and their fittings, during the search, after first warning the owners to remove their belongings. Joosten later wrote that on 10 August, as a result of orders from the Defence Department, the guards burnt down 27 huts on the north-west side of the island. Supposedly this was a disciplinary move, however, the result rather outweighed the crime. In the absence of any form of common social room, the huts provided the internees with shelter each day during the hours when (excluding wet days) their living quarters were out of bounds. The huts, which usually served four to six men, also provided a quiet place for them to study. Internees even sold their huts, which were numbered and which the internees kept locked. One changed

hands for 30/- two months before the burnings<sup>37</sup>. Joosten claimed that of the 27 huts, which were always open to inspections by the guards, 26 belonged to men who had committed no breaches of discipline, while none had ever been used for clandestine activities. Although permitted to rebuild them, materials with which to do the job were not readily available<sup>38</sup>. Probably few were rebuilt. Given that the burnings allegedly occurred because things useful to escapees might be hidden in the huts, it is also fortunate that the escapees themselves were hidden elsewhere<sup>39</sup>.

Matheson evidently left the island later in the day on 10 August<sup>40</sup>, however, the reasons are unknown. On 13 August he began 14 days leave based on medical advice<sup>41</sup>. His replacement, Captain William Henry Hawkins, an ex-auctioneer, was also formerly Pahiatua's Member of Parliament. In October 1916 Hawkins injured his knee in the trenches, thus effecting his ability to march. However, while in France he also had charge respectively of a Composite Labour Party for tunnelling, and the Burial Corps. He returned to New Zealand in early 1918 and joined the Director of Personal Services' Branch on 31 July 1918<sup>42</sup>.

Meanwhile, on 25 August, Sir James Allen, then Acting Prime Minister, prepared the Governor General's reply to von Luckner. He stated that the recent Royal Commission found no reliable evidence of ill-treatment on the island. He did not explain that this meant that many accused former guards were not there to defend themselves, so the judge disallowed evidence against them. He added, though, that Matheson refused to accept a less respectful demeanor from the internees than from his own guard, saying that many times Matheson went out of his way to do things to improve the lot of the internees. As a result of the Royal Commission, the military authorities saw no reason to remove him<sup>43</sup>.

On 15 August, Osburne-Lilly learned that a Somes guard, while drinking at the Carlton Hotel, had claimed that the Joostens were paying for the transportation of letters, hidden in prisoners' boots, to and from the island. Matters took another turn on 17 August when Corporal Andrew Maguire of the Military Police, contacted his superior. He advised that about four guards from Somes, the wife of one being a barmaid at the

Carlton, were in the habit of conveying information to the wife of internee, Bernard Ellis. This led to the discovery that six guards had criminal records ranging from breaking and entering, and breaches of the Gaming Act, to a professional conman<sup>44</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> ES 8/6/1918 2(3)

<sup>2</sup> Major Osburne-Lilly to Under Secretary, Dept. of Internal Affairs, 14/8/1918, in David Murie, 'Henry Nicolai Christian Joosten', (Heretaunga, 1995). Unpublished typescript. This states that "it is evident that the prisoners will do all in their power to retain (their naturalisation papers). Some have refused to hand (them over) when requested." Also Col. G.W. Patterson to Director of Personal Services, 18/7/1918. Probably in File DA 1 24/276 (NA), but this copy in Tony Kronfeld's *Gustav and Louisa Kronfeld: Some Notes prepared by their Grandson* (New Zealand, 1993). p. 252.

<sup>3</sup> J. Hislop to Chief of General Staff, 13/8/1919. AAAB 482/60q, Bornhold, A.M.A. (NA)

<sup>4</sup> Karl Joosten, Rotterdam, to William Massey, Prime Minister, N.Z., 10/11/1912. AAAB 482/57a Joosten, K. (NA).

<sup>5</sup> K. Joosten to W.J. Pugh, 5/6/1918. AAAB 449/52a, Complaints by POWs to American and Swiss Consuls. (NA)

<sup>6</sup> W.J. Pugh to Director of Personal Services, and attachments from London, 14/5/1918. AAAB 449/52a (NA)

<sup>7</sup> K. Joosten to W.J. Pugh, 5/6/1918. AAAB 449/52a (NA)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 6/7/1918. AAAB 449/52a (NA)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 6/7/1918. Also cover letter by Major Matheson to Director of Personal Services, 10/7/1918. AAAB 449/52a (NA)

<sup>10</sup> *AJHR*, 1919, H-33, p. 22

<sup>11</sup> Major Matheson to Swiss Consul, 9/10/1918. AAAB 449/52a (NA)

<sup>12</sup> Major Matheson to Director of Personal Services, 23/9/1918, AAAB 482/52a (NA). Letter includes the transcript of an incident on 25/6/1918 regarding too many letters being sent.

<sup>13</sup> K. Joosten to W.J. Pugh, 31/7/1918. AAAB 449/52a (NA)

<sup>14</sup> Major Matheson to Director of Personal Services, 23/9/1918. AAAB 449/52a (NA)

<sup>15</sup> List of promotions and demotions in No. SI/216, Laine, R. (Personnel Archive, NZDF). Also accusations against Laine regarding Christmas Day 1915 in AAAB 482/32j, Bilke, E. (NA)

<sup>16</sup> Major Matheson to Director of Personal Services, 19/7/1918 AAAB 482/2a, Tamme, E.R.R. (Robert Hall). Also Medical Report for week ending 2/8/1918, Motuihi Island Internment Camp. AAAB 482/2g, Nawrath, A. and AAAB 482/49k Manthei, W. (NA)

<sup>17</sup> K. Joosten to Justice Chapman, 26/3/1918. Micro MS-18 (WTU)

<sup>18</sup> Graf von Luckner, Commandant S.M.S. *Seeadler*, Motuihi Island Internment Camp, to Governor General of N.Z., 29/7/1918. AAAB 449/52a (NA)

<sup>19</sup> *AJHR*, 1919, H-33. p. 16-7

<sup>20</sup> K. Joosten to W.J. Pugh, 31/7/1918. AAAB 449/52a (NA)

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 7/9/1918. (NA)

<sup>22</sup> Major Matheson to Adjutant General, 12/1/1918. AAAB 482/50I Eilender, R.L. (NA)

<sup>23</sup> Inquiry into the attempted suicide of Alfred Kraut, 31/1/1917. AAAB 482/31a, Kraut, A. (NA)

<sup>24</sup> EP 31/7/1918 8(2), 1/8/1918 7(8) & 8(9), MDT 1/8/1918 5(5)

<sup>25</sup> ES 5/8/1918 2(4)

<sup>26</sup> EP 12/8/1918 8(3)

<sup>27</sup> Memo by Lieut. Col. (unnamed), N.Z. Staff, 'A' Duties, 3/9/1919. AAAB 482/51f, Kosel, K.A.H. (NA)

<sup>28</sup> A. Kraut to A. Lossau, 19/3/1919. AAAB 482/31a (NA)

<sup>29</sup> Major Matheson to Director of Personal Services, 3/8/1918. AAAB 482/51f (NA)

<sup>30</sup> EP 31/8/1918 7(7)

<sup>31</sup> EP 9/8/1918 8(1)

<sup>32</sup> Trlin, p. 116-117

<sup>33</sup> P.M. Sulenta to Major Matheson, 9/8/1918. AD 10 2/20, Discipline - Somes Island Guard, Alleged Bribing of. (NA)

<sup>34</sup> EP 10/8/1918 6(4)

<sup>35</sup> EP 12/8/1918 8(3)

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<sup>36</sup> EP 14/8/1918 7(7)

<sup>37</sup> H. Permien and Karl Ph. E. Grun to Commandant, Somes Island, 10/8/1918. AAAB 482/42L, Permien, H. (NA)

<sup>38</sup> K. Joosten to W.J. Pugh, 7/9/1918. AAAB 449/52a (NA)

<sup>39</sup> Major Matheson to Swiss Consul, 9/10/1918 - letter endorsed 'cancelled'. AAAB 449/52a (NA)

<sup>40</sup> K. Joosten to W.J. Pugh, 7/9/1918. AAAB 449/52a (NA)

<sup>41</sup> Major Osburne-Lilly to (uncertain), 14/8/1918. No. 7118, Matheson (Personnel Archive, NZDF)

<sup>42</sup> No 14530, Hawkins, Capt. W. H. (Personnel Archive, NZDF)

<sup>43</sup> J. Allen to Governor General, 24/8/1918. AAAB 449/52a (NA)

<sup>44</sup> Police Report of Chief Detective J. Boddam, Detective Office, Wellington, 27/8/1918. AD 10 2/20 (NA) Note: This document suggests that the prefix used to distinguish non-NZEF men in Home Service, associated with the Somes Island Internment Guards is 396/..., as in Timothy Driscoll, No. 396/24064.



One of a set of photos taken during the Kaiser's Birthday celebrations in late January 1917. This photo shows the section of beach the internees were free to use on the north-west side of Somes Island. Also shown are some of the huts the internees built for use during the period of the day when their main accommodation was out of bounds. The Defence Department ordered these huts destroyed by fire during the hoax "escape" in 1918. Unpaid, forced internee labour created the reclaimed section of beach front the men are standing on. Although difficult to see in a reproduction, one man in a wide-brimmed hat near the centre-left of the photo, appears to be wearing a dress. The internees made the clothing and hats the uniformed men are wearing. (Photo: F-112288-1/2, R. Hart Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library)

## XII

**Decline of the Matheson Empire**

Joosten wrote what was easily his most optimistic letter to Swiss Consul Pugh on 7 September 1918, when he explained how much the change of commandant had improved conditions in the camp. While some work continued under protest, necessary camp work was now “satisfactorily regulated.” In addition, the internees had finally taken over running the camp canteen on their own account on 1 September, and they anticipated stock-buying trips to replenish it. Joosten asked Pugh to leave the matter alone in the meantime, assuming he had intended to do anything about the earlier complaint. He also advised that the internees wished to place crosses on the graves at Karori Cemetery of seven internees who had died while at the camp<sup>1</sup>.

The personal files of other internees also show a more cordial relationship between themselves and Hawkins. Perhaps the most telling was his contact with Dorothy Zahn, wife of travelling showman Joseph Anton Zahn, known on Somes as “Rinaldo”. The couple lost track of each other in 1914 as the Australian-based Mrs Zahn changed addresses. They appeared happy to relocate each other<sup>2</sup>. Another involved a request for payment for three internees, resulting from maintenance work they did at the camp between 1916 and 1918. Hawkins reasoned that, whatever the original conditions, the work (painting and building steps) saved the Defence Department a significant sum and that payment would settle the issue<sup>3</sup>.

Still, on 14 September, Joosten wrote that he was aware that his “efforts to remedy the ill-conditions formerly existing in this camp have been recklessly and maliciously misrepresented.” Frustrated that Pugh’s will to assist seemed limited, Joosten remarked that he felt the German Government would be “at least greatly interested” to know that three of its four Consuls were now interned, despite their New Zealand citizenship.

Matheson returned to Somes on 16 September, with Hawkins departing the next day after putting Matheson “to the wise” on matters instituted in his absence<sup>4</sup>. On 26 September, Pugh forwarded a copy of Joosten’s 7 September letter to Osburne-Lilly,

asking that assistance be given in the matters Joosten raised. By 2 October, Pugh's sincere attitude toward the internees had changed to one of apology for troubling Osburne-Lilly regarding Joosten. He also now considered Joosten's claims to be exaggerated<sup>5</sup>.

Although subsequently cancelled (albeit filed for posterity), Matheson's angry response, dated 9 October, to Joosten's comparatively joyous letter praising Hawkins, reveals a hint of jealousy. Evidently Pugh had attempted to contact Eberhard Focke, but Matheson considered 64-year-old Focke would have insufficient courage to say what he thought. He said the spirit of intimidation was rife in the camp and that he had been unsuccessful in encouraging internees to individually express any legitimate grievances they had. He thought many internees who might approach his staff, were too nervous to do so for fear the action might be "construed as spying or crawling". For this reason also he had not called any internees to support him during the Royal Commission, although he was sure many would have spoken in favour of the camp's management. He considered that the internees' approach was nationalistic rather than based on their individual consciousness'. No-one dared speak against the collective view of the "bad minority", he claimed, least he be called pro-British, a traitor or a spy. Matheson felt that, despite their diminished workload, the internees' complaints had increased and they were more discontented. He was "quite convinced that the prisoners' complaints will not go away until they regain their liberty"<sup>6</sup>.

On 10 October, Joosten again wrote to Pugh:

Since I wrote you last Capt. Hawkins the Commandant I referred to, has unfortunately left and Major Matheson returned here. During Capt. Hawkins regime the camp was run with strict and impartial discipline, but on the apparent premise that we were alien enemies who had to be detained here for the sole purpose of preventing us from participating on the side of our Country against the Allies.

He added that within a week Hawkins had settled a number of vexing questions that had irritated internees for four years. The services of elected representatives were utilised to:

Realize a harmonious relationship of the inner management. A kind of limited home-rule, such as is in existence in Ruhleben and other Civilian Camps in Germany and also England was attained and worked smoothly and without the

least friction between the authorities and the inmates. The treatment on the whole was civil and humane and not such as is meted out to Criminals.

With the return of Matheson came the return of the old atmosphere. "Ill-feeling, insecurity and intense distress prevails throughout," Joosten wrote. Joosten understood that two days after Matheson's return he ordered his guards to load ball-cartridges into their rifles at 6:30 am, as there "would be some shooting." He said that at the time the internees were just getting out of bed and that nothing could have occurred to irritate Matheson. The next evening Matheson ordered all the stores removed from the cook-house to the Guards Barracks, only to return them late the following night. Evidently even the guards objected, leaving the quartermaster to work alone until dawn. The following day (21 September) Osburne-Lilly visited and spoke to the Joostens, Focke and the ex-squad leaders (presumably Matheson had sacked them). They explained what had happened and expressed concern for the safety of the internees:

Each of us assured him that we were convinced that Maj. Matheson is suffering from mental troubles, which seem to become most acute at full moon.

Osburne-Lilly did not keep his promise to the internees to return to the island within a week, nor did he take any apparent steps to safeguard them. Joosten listed other incidents, including the arrests of five ex-squad leaders and the arrest of and assault upon Wilhelm Appelt by the guard who had previously assaulted Paul Arnold and others, including Joosten himself and Appelt on a previous occasion. Doubtless this was Lance Corporal Craig. Wilhelm Appelt's conduct sheet lists Craig as a witness to incidents that took place on 11-12 March 1918, 2 October 1918 and also 17 January 1919 at Featherston<sup>7</sup>. Joosten said this man grossly insulted many internees using "vile invectives". Many months earlier Matheson evidently gave Craig a "holiday" and said that he would have nothing more to do with the internees<sup>8</sup>. In truth Craig remained until at least July 1919, by which time he was a corporal<sup>9</sup>.

Joosten claimed that:

The whole Camp is in a fever heat of excitement [sic] and we all fear that the sanest council cannot for long prevent an outbreak of passion which must end in bloodshed.

He said that he had personally warned Matheson that extreme measures were contemplated in some quarters and as a result had lost the confidence of some internees<sup>10</sup>.

Matheson's outraged response to Osburne-Lilly, dated 27 October, describes Joosten's letter as "despicable, in the main untrue, and the remainder very misleading and grossly exaggerated." Other words used included "colossal impertinence" (regarding Joosten's alleged knowledge of consular matters compared to Pugh's) and "consummate impudence" (regarding apparent criticism of Osburne-Lilly). In addition to outlining points with which he disagreed, he referred to the aforementioned remarks as "obvious" and "no comments are needed." Matheson then applied to take proceedings against Joosten under the Army Act 27(1), on the grounds that Joosten had, allegedly, knowingly and willingly made a false statement. Interestingly, Osburne-Lilly endorsed the letter: "No further action to be taken", although the note is undated<sup>11</sup>.

In early 1918, the authorities decided the camp justified a small hospital as a way to avoid constantly using Wellington Hospital. Hospital fees of around £700 per year, the need to guard sick internees while there, internees feigning illness to leave the island<sup>12</sup> and "complications and discontent" on the part of other people at the hospital<sup>13</sup>, all influenced this decision. The facility included a three-bed surgical ward, a small operating theatre and a sterilising room. Matheson took it over on 14 October<sup>14</sup>, several weeks before the camp succumbed to the effects of the Influenza Epidemic<sup>15</sup>. Internee files show the hospital arrived just in time.

The *Feilding Star* of Friday, 15 November 1918, described the internees' alleged view of the end of the war. Under the all-too-familiar heading, "Enemy in the Midst," the paper claimed they said:

Are we down-hearted?' and the obvious answer, 'No!', were shouted in guttural German voices on Somes Island on Tuesday as well as by hundreds in English in the streets of Wellington.

It added that in most cases the internees refused point blank to believe the news of Germany's defeat. As the epidemic still dominated the authorities' attention, they evidently left the internees to celebrate the belief that "the hordes of the Vaterland" had

won the peace, and not the Allied armies. By Thursday the internees were described as still happy the war was over, "but not quite so sure the cables had lied." Some said they would only believe Germany had been beaten when they were told so in Berlin<sup>16</sup>.

With the advent of peace, a live-and-let-live attitude might have quickly resumed. However, in reply to a reader's letter asking them to "keep on hitting up the German," the *Feilding Star* responded:

It is our intention to pursue that policy. We reiterate that all suspect Germans, especially those interned, should be sent back to Germany as soon as shipping is available. The best place in the whole wide world for Germans is Germany. We are told that the Huns on Soames[sic] Island desire to go back to Berlin, so as to learn authoritatively the outcome of the war. Send them back!

The bitter article continued in a similar vein, ending "We should be satisfied with nothing short of the extradition of all interned Germans, at the very least"<sup>17</sup>.

The Influenza Epidemic effected guards more than internees. The *Feilding Star* reported that only a few mild cases developed amongst internees. Meanwhile, Alice Matheson tended and provided comforts to the ailing guards during her thrice weekly visits. On 13 November, Matheson reported that 28-year-old Assistant Commandant, Lieutenant Jack, was dangerously ill with pneumonia and had been transferred that day to the Victoria Ward at Wellington Hospital. Matheson also wrote to the Director of Recruiting that:

Owing to the number of staff affected with influenza, it is necessary that a substitute be supplied at once. The officer furnished should be young and hardy and capable of quickly adapting himself to conditions lacking in social comforts and variety of interests<sup>18</sup>.

Lieutenant Jack succumbed in Wellington Hospital on 15 November<sup>19</sup>. However, whereas Matheson's relationship with his previous assistant commandant (Rogers) was strained - to say the least - this was not the case with Jack. In notifying the Director of Recruiting of the death, Matheson added, "I desire to place on record my very high appreciation of the valuable service rendered by Lieut. Jack as Assistant Commandant, Somes Island"<sup>20</sup>. By 22 November, there had been no new cases for four days and the epidemic on the island was "dying down"<sup>21</sup>.

While there were no influenza deaths amongst the internees, entries on a number of files indicate brief illnesses. Paul Nester wrote to unnamed friends in Kaikohe on 23 November saying that he had been laid up for three days and that more than 150 internees were effected. He said while there were a few severe cases, no-one died. In addition he wrote that he had been "declared a dangerous subject, a vermin, a scum of the earth and God knows what else." As a result, his confiscated letter remained safely on his personal file for posterity<sup>22</sup>.

No sooner had the epidemic waned, than the authorities announced plans to shift the camp. Faced with the prospect of ship-loads of soldiers returning with more contagious diseases, the somewhat shell-shocked Health Department required the return of its quarantine islands. Prisoner numbers had clearly overtaxed Somes for some time and the authorities knew that with the war effectively over - and Germany's Note Verbale - the internees were unlikely to willingly endure water-carrying duty in the future. While enlarging the camp at Motuihi was one alternative, building a camp in the interior of the country was another<sup>23</sup>. In the end, the Defence Department chose Featherston Military Camp as the most suitable replacement.

Still, even though their homeland had lost, the internees were reportedly overjoyed at the prospect of release. The discovery that the terms of the Armistice meant they would stay interned while British prisoners remained in Germany, naturally dampened their spirits somewhat<sup>24</sup>.

Meanwhile, a committee of Ruhleben's civilian internees began supervising the break-up of their camp near Berlin on 28 October. As their guards' discipline broke down, the internees took virtual charge of the camp, even protecting it from possible marauders. From 11 November they were no longer "prisoners" and freely moved in and out of the camp and into parts of it that were previously prohibited. On Sunday 17 November, half the internees were in Berlin and many did not appear the next day for Roll Call. In the final few days spent there, none of the normal organised activities occurred. This left long time internee, J. Davidson Ketchum, speculating that for some "Ruhlebenites this may have been the first experience of genuine boredom since 1914." On Saturday, 23

November, the last British internees farewelled the camp and a contingent of Russian prisoners arrived<sup>25</sup>.

The internee files reveal some inter-ethnic difficulties on Somes, the Germans' relationship with the comparatively small group of largely pro-British Dalmatians being of special note. For example, Matheson's excuse for preventing the establishment of a Camp Committee to liaise between himself and the internees, was on the grounds that this would "inevitably introduce party Government." He considered that genuine complaints by the minority grouping, namely Dalmatians and "semi-Colonials", would probably be "quashed at birth" in such an environment. He said similar things had occurred previously<sup>26</sup>.

In the light of this criticism, it is ironic that in June 1918 - in his capacity as Camp Spokesman - it was Karl Joosten who wrote to the Swedish Consul in Australia, on behalf of the non-German internees. However, the New Zealand authorities stopped his letter, stating that those internees must make their own complaints to "their" consul<sup>27</sup>. Finally, on 16 September, Karl Stanzar, of the Committee of Austro-Hungarian, Bulgarian & Turk Internees, wrote on their behalf. He explained that many of the men the Swedish Consul represented were destitute and asked the consul to seek grants from their respective countries. He noted that the Germans - more correctly some of them - had received 10/- per month, from the German Government or private funds since April 1917. As this money allowed them to supplement their food supplies, their health had improved considerably. Surprisingly, this possibly became the first contact these internees had with the consul who supposedly represented their interests<sup>28</sup>.

Conditions in the camp undoubtedly improved significantly in the latter part of 1918, although perhaps the embittered internees were slow to acknowledge them. Many Germans received a regular income and the internees ran their own canteen. Meanwhile, water-carrying had ended, at least temporarily, while the hated General Fatigue "exercise" was definitely gone. Now the internees entertained themselves scavenging materials to rebuild their huts. Others (not all would voluntarily do so) received wages for work on the new hospital and ablution benches, in addition to doing repairs and

maintenance around the camp. Men even wore oilskin raincoats to do their fatigue work in wet weather. However, perhaps the most telling transition of all was Matheson's remark in October 1918:

A supply of house shoes has been obtained in order that sentries, taking early morning roll-calls, may complete their duties without disturbing the prisoners<sup>29</sup>.

- <sup>1</sup> K. Joosten to W.J. Pugh, 7/9/1918. AAAB 449/52a, Complaints by POWs to American and Swiss Consuls. (NA)
- <sup>2</sup> Dorothy Zahn to (probably Minister of Defence), 30/8/1918, Captain Hawkins to Dorothy Zahn, 11/9/1918. AAAB 482/36g, Rinaldo, Z. (NA)
- <sup>3</sup> Capt. W.H. Hawkins to Director of Personal Services, 6/9/1918. AAAB 482/13d, Gönning, H. A. (NA) Gönning was a ship's carpenter. The other internees were Wilhelm Knab, a painter and decorator by trade, and Wilhelm Losche (not researched).
- <sup>4</sup> Major Osburne-Lilly to Captain Hawkins, 16/9/1918. No. 7118, Matheson. (Personnel Archive, NZDF)
- <sup>5</sup> W.J. Pugh to Director of Personal Services, 26/9/1918 and 2/10/1918. AAAB 449/52a (NA)
- <sup>6</sup> Major Matheson to W.J. Pugh, unsend letter 9/8/1918. AAAB 449/52a (NA)
- <sup>7</sup> AAAB 482/20a, Appelt, W.P. (NA)
- <sup>8</sup> K. Joosten to W.J. Pugh, 10/10/1918. AAAB 482/57a, Joosten, K. (NA)
- <sup>9</sup> Nominal Roll of Guard at Prisoner of War Internment Camp, Featherston, (a) probably January 1919, and (b) 21 March 1919. Both list No. 68, Corporal W. Craig. AD 1 15/142, Guards, POW Internment Camp. Also Extract from Weekly Report on POW, Featherston Internment Camp, 26/8/1919, AAAB 482/65f, Jakabsen, J. (NA)
- <sup>10</sup> K. Joosten to W.J. Pugh, 10/10/1918. AAAB 482/57a (NA)
- <sup>11</sup> Major Matheson to Director of Personal Services, 27/10/1918. AAAB 482/57a (NA)
- <sup>12</sup> e.g. Supposed cardiac problems at Wellington Hospital 1916-17, in AAAB 482/13e, Michalon, J. (NA)
- <sup>13</sup> e.g. Attempted indecent assault incident at Wellington Hospital, 12/6/1917, in AAAB 482/39c Krausch, W. Spitting on floor at Wellington Hospital, May 1918, in AAAB 482/5c Lenaz, L. (NA)
- <sup>14</sup> Lieut. Col. R.H. Makgill to Director of Railways & Works, 19/3/1918. R.S.F. Henderson, Surgeon-General, to G.O.C., 28/3/1918. Major for Director of Works, to Quartermaster-General, 15/10/1918. AD 81 6/9, Hospital - Somes Island. (NA)
- <sup>15</sup> EP 13/11/1918 6(3)
- <sup>16</sup> FS 15/11/1918 2(3)
- <sup>17</sup> FS 16/11/1918 2(3)
- <sup>18</sup> D. Matheson to Director of Personal Services, 13 November 1918. No. 12/2339 Jack (Personnel Archive, NZDF.)
- <sup>19</sup> FS 16/11/1918 2(4)
- <sup>20</sup> D. Matheson to Director of Recruiting, 2 December 1918. No. 12/2339 Jack (Personnel Archive, NZDF.)
- <sup>21</sup> FS 22/11/1918 2(5)
- <sup>22</sup> Paul Nester to 'Friends', Kaikohe, 23/11/1918. AAAB 482/25d, Nester, P. (NA)
- <sup>23</sup> Director of Personal Services to Adjutant General, (received 3/9/1918). AD 1 12/84, Water Supply, Somes Island (NA)
- <sup>24</sup> EP 14/12/1918 7(9)
- <sup>25</sup> Ketchum p. 355
- <sup>26</sup> Major Matheson to W.J. Pugh, 23/9/1918. AAAB 449/52a (NA)
- <sup>27</sup> Major Osburne-Lilly to Commandant, Somes Is., 13/6/1918. AAAB 482/57a (NA)
- <sup>28</sup> K. Stanzar to Royal Swedish Consul General, Sydney, 16/9/1918. J.H. Andersson, Acting Swedish Consul-General for Sweden, to Karl Stanzar, 30/10/1918. AAAB 449/52a (NA)
- <sup>29</sup> Major Matheson to Swiss Consul, unsend letter 9/10/1918, AAAB 449/52a (NA)



Although captioned in publications as a band formed by internees while they were on Somes Island, this band will have consisted primarily of members of the twelve-piece Bavarian String Band that found itself interned in the first days of the war. The Bandmaster (presumably the conductor at centre) was Rudolf Mersey. The band worked in and around Auckland for some twelve years, where they made their living playing in the streets. A number of band-members supported wives and children back in Germany - until war erupted. Initially band members sought parole to return to their work. However, by 17 August 1914, they knew it would be too dangerous due to the probability that they would attract public animosity. As a result, they asked to remain on Somes.

Although the band certainly performed on the island on a number of occasions, a single programme remains in Mersey's personal file. This outlines a concert performed on "the Sports Beach" (the probable site of this photo) at 1:45 pm on Sunday, 3 February 1918. The programme included music by well-known composers and also five marches, including "See Adler" and "Tirpitz", composed by Mersey. (Photo: F-112230-1/2, R. Hart Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library. Personal file reference: AAAB 482/69h, Mersey, Rudolph, National Archives)

## XIII

**Featherston Internment Camp**

On 5 December Karl Joosten contacted W.H. Pugh, the Swiss Consul, on behalf of the Camp Committee. He reminded him that it was almost twelve months since his last visit. With the camp about to be dissolved, he assumed, the internees wished to discuss conditions surrounding repatriation and the possibility of those who were New Zealand-based returning home for Christmas. In addition, given the long internment and the absolute destitution of some due to their inability to earn money, Joosten also asked if the New Zealand Government would consider granting them compensation. He added that with the war over, the uncertainty of their release "is almost the hardest to bear"<sup>1</sup>.

It was the *Evening Post* of 10 December<sup>2</sup> that revealed to the internees that they were moving to Featherston Military Camp. At the same time they learned that they were to share it with tuberculosis patients and isolation cases suffering from what they assumed to be contagious diseases. Joosten wrote to Sir James Allen the next day, protesting emphatically at the prospect of being housed in close proximity to such people. He also expressed concern at the thought of occupying a camp where the Influenza Epidemic had just killed over one hundred New Zealand soldiers:

In the name of the Internees of this Camp, I request you to take such care of our lives and well being as we are entitled to receive from a civilised state<sup>3</sup>.

The letter found its way to the Director of Medical Services, who replied that unlike British prisoners in many German camps, they would be in no danger whatsoever. Instead they would live under the same conditions as the camp's commandant and other staff<sup>4</sup>. Under the circumstances, that comment would hardly be very comforting.

The people of Wairarapa evidently felt little concern either at the pending arrival of the internees, or the rumoured establishment of a Consumptive (tuberculosis) Sanitarium for ailing soldiers. However, like the internees, they objected strongly to discovering they were also to receive a couple of hundred of "their boys" who had contracted "a disease as loathsome as leprosy," while defending King and country<sup>5</sup>. In fact, it was neither a sanitarium nor a leprosy colony that they were to receive, but rather around 200 venereal disease sufferers from Quarantine Island in Otago Harbour. The prisoners and the

venereal disease cases had to go somewhere, Sir James Allen said, and Featherston offered facilities for isolation and treatment<sup>6</sup>.

The transfer to Featherston was obviously a huge exercise, but clearly planning occurred over time. Major Osburne-Lilly had written rather ominously in early September, suggesting stringent methods to encourage internees to assist with the transfer, should insufficient men volunteer. The matter would come under instructions issued by the British Government, which evidently stated that they should ignore Germany's Note Verbale on the subject and manipulate the internees' rations to encourage them to volunteer. Osburne-Lilly wrote: "Nothing that we may do or not do is going to affect Germany's attitude to our men, and the sooner we realise this the better"<sup>7</sup>.

The internees began packing up the camp on Friday, 13 December, but even the camp's final hours were not without trouble. That night, as the occupants of Squadroom 6 lay sleeping, Sergeant Laine, a lieutenant and another officer walked in and proceeded to charge William Otteng with "calling some words out of the window." When he denied the charge, the whole squad (10 men) was arrested and taken to the lock-up. There they, and another eight men who were already locked up, spent the remainder of their last night on Somes<sup>8</sup>.

Finally, on Saturday morning, 14 December - and doubtless in some cases for the first time in four years - 321 internees set foot on the mainland. Other "good conduct" men landed at Wellington where they took charge of the luggage. Planned to occur without publicity, the main party arrived at the Petone wharf on the *SS Duchess* at 10:45 am. From there they boarded a special 10-car train standing at the Gear Meat Company's siding. Guards kept the audience, which consisted of children and one or two adults who appeared to be relatives of the internees, at a safe distance. The first batch to board the train included Otteng and his companions from Somes' lockup. After a night spent in the concrete-floored cell without blankets or bedding, Otteng and his companions were taken straight to the boat without any chance to pack their belongings. Consequently, several days later they sought help to retrieve missing property, including money and tobacco that had been taken from them in the lock-up<sup>9</sup>.

The *Evening Post* also recorded that most of the other internees seemed happy, healthy and well clothed, and that several groups began singing in their native tongue as they marched to the train. They soon boarded it and quickly departed for Featherston: "with every appearance, as an onlooker remarked, of a picnic party." The "good conduct" men, who had travelled from Wellington on the train, stayed at Petone to pack the remaining luggage onto trucks<sup>10</sup>. The files of some of these men indicate that money was the incentive used to gain their help<sup>11</sup>.

On 16 December the Motuihi internees moved to Narrow Neck Camp. Ex-Governor Schultz made the trip from the wharf by car, while the main body, led by von Luckner, marched under guard. Other than a few "hoots" from the roadside that greeted Schultz at one point, the main activity generated by the transfer was the laughter and joking of the "remarkably healthy and well-fed" prisoners<sup>12</sup>. Still, when a reporter photographed the procession, von Luckner concealed his face with a newspaper he was carrying. Another used his hat to the same effect<sup>13</sup>.

The strain of the end of both the war and the camp clearly told on Matheson. On 16 December, he was placed on 28-days leave due to ill-health, with Captain Hawkins again becoming Acting Commandant. Major John Wallace Brunt was appointed the same day to take charge in Matheson's absence. A medical report, prepared on 16 December, described Matheson's suffering as nervous debility caused by over-work during the transfer of the camp. He also suffered from insomnia and was getting worse<sup>14</sup>.

A number of very significant changes occurred at Featherston. For example, the Military Camp's Commandant oversaw the internment camp. In addition a range of experienced, and even decorated, soldiers were increasingly available to assist with its management. Doubtless local employment conditions also appealed somewhat more than those available on the isolated Somes. In addition, the prevailing culture regarded returned soldiers as those most deserving of the quickly shrinking range of military jobs. As a result, the aged and unfit Home Service men who previously served as guards on Somes, did not make the grade.

As Matheson had no assistant on Somes for three years, his superiors considered that they need not replace the deceased Lieutenant Jack<sup>15</sup>. However, the evolution at Featherston resulted in Colonel C.R. Macdonald, Featherston's Commandant, appointing Lieutenant Leonard Parkinson MC to the position. He replaced Lieutenant C.E. Taylor, who presumably was temporary and who was to go before a Permanent Invalid Board. Parkinson, who subsequently applied to become Second in Command, unsuccessfully hoped for a job on the Repatriation Guard. He earned his Military Cross in the Middle East in 1917, just before a shrapnel wound to his leg sent him home. While Macdonald's superiors wished to dispense with Parkinson, they relented when he explained the distinct duties of the Guard's permanent officers, as opposed to the Repatriation Guard. He considered that keeping the latter separate prevented a disorganisation of the camp's administration if a sudden embarkation occurred<sup>16</sup>.

An examination on 11 January granted Matheson a further 14 days sick leave, and when that ended he was keen to resume his duties. However, circumstances in the camp clearly differed by late January. Colonel Macdonald wrote to Headquarters on 30 January, explaining that because the camp's administration had changed considerably since the shift, a change of Commandants would "not be in the interests of the service."<sup>17</sup> The stigma of the Royal Commission doubtless also hung over Matheson. As a result, the fifty-two-year-old was again medically examined and found 'normal' on 17 February, in anticipation of demobilisation.

Major Brunt, an architect and engineer by profession, proved a different commandant to Matheson. Whereas Matheson's previous active service amounted to endless training, Brunt's service included three years in the Cape Town Highlanders during the South African War. In 1911 he joined the 11th Taranaki Rifles, and by April 1914 he was a captain in the regiment beneath future Gallipoli hero, Lieutenant-Colonel W.G. Malone. In September 1914, with the temporary rank of Major, Brunt sailed for Gallipoli with the NZEF's Main Body. During training in Egypt in late 1914 and early 1915, Malone is recalled as having worked his men harder and longer than those of any other NZEF battalion. He also weeded out any who did not meet his high standards. It is noteworthy

therefore that Brunt maintained his position until he became dangerously ill with cesal pneumonia at Anzac Cove on 12 July 1915. This was several weeks before Malone's death by "friendly fire" on 8 August, at which time only 70 of the battalion's 760 men remained<sup>18</sup>.

Transferred back to England, Brunt's health remained a problem. In October 1916, General Richardson described him as unfit for general service, but a "very good disciplinarian" who had done good work at Codford<sup>19</sup>. It was August 1917 before he returned to New Zealand, after convalescing with his family in South Africa. In April 1917 he became Adjutant at Tauherenikau Military Camp and then Officer-in-Charge between November 1917 and the camp's closure on 6 December 1918. Brunt's work at Tauherenikau, along with associated work done at Featherston Military Camp, was also highly valued<sup>20</sup>. Matheson's illness clearly created a timely opening for him.

Plans to dispose of the internees began immediately the war ended. On 25 November 1918, Colonel Gibbon, Chief of General Staff, sought recommendations regarding deportation and release. He recognised that civilian prisoners of war could not be repatriated against their will, but could be deported. He also knew that if "deported", New Zealand must bear the cost. "Repatriation" meant the repatriate's home country paid<sup>21</sup>. Inquiries as to correct procedures included a call on 11 December by Major General Robins, commander of the Military Forces, to send the 65 seamen removed from overseas ships to Britain. This would save New Zealand the cost of keeping them. He considered that sufficient shipping would be available until early in the New Year and that internment camp guards and returned soldiers would be pleased to make such an overseas trip. Later though, such facilities might not be available<sup>22</sup>.

One of Major Matheson's last duties on the island was the compilation of a list of all internees on Somes, complete with his recommendations on the possible means by which the Government should dispose of each man. Of the 324 listed, he recommended the deportation of 260, in addition to 11 captured during naval operations. The remaining 31 Austro-Germans and 18 Yugoslavs, he thought could stay in New Zealand due to their pro-British attitudes. In four cases, such as New Zealand-born men, he was uncertain.

He did not consider the Yugoslavs (Dalmatians) hostile and said they impressed him with their "sincere admiration" of the British people and their loyalty despite internment. His comments on the "deportees", however, clearly indicate mutual dislike<sup>23</sup>.

Colonel Gibbon (probably along with Sir James Allen, Minister of Defence) was in no doubt as to which internees he specifically wished to see decamp totally. On 20 December he instructed Brunt to obtain a written acknowledgment from Karl Joosten and Lothar Eilender that they wished to be repatriated. Joosten was also to be advised that the New Zealand Government would not be responsible for paying the passages of his wife and children, but if he paid, the Government would ensure that they travelled on the same ship as the repatriated prisoners. Instructions from Britain early in the war established travelling conditions for families of internees. At that time the American Consul General had funds available for their fares. Gibbon suggested, therefore, that the Swiss Consul might also have funds available<sup>24</sup>.

Although only about 100 internees were to go in the proposed January repatriation, plans to place them on the *Arawa* came to naught when Shaw, Saville & Albion Co. refused, due to an earlier experience, to mix German prisoners with paying passengers<sup>25</sup>. Next came the troopship *Ulimaroa*, due to leave in mid-January, until it was sent urgently to retrieve European troops from Mesopotamia before the hot weather set in<sup>26</sup>. Next came the *Tofua*, until on 10 January, that also, along with all troop accommodation, was declared reserved for British troops<sup>27</sup>.

Preparing the Repatriation Guard occurred in conjunction with planning the January sailing. For example, on 27 December, the Director of Recruiting contacted all Military Districts, seeking five men from each for special duty overseas. In addition to the range of matrimonial and parental qualifications, these men were to be aged between 20 and 40, preferably returned servicemen, of extra good physique, good height, well-built with no physical defects. They were required to embark at Wellington on about 15 January. In the confidential follow-up letter of the same date, the Director advised that this special duty was to act "as Guard over certain Prisoners of War who are being dispatched to

Britain.” The guards needed to be physically able to handle these prisoners in an emergency<sup>28</sup>.

By 4 January the Repatriation Guard consisted of twenty-six men: an officer, a sergeant-major, a sergeant, two corporals and twenty-one privates. Some sought their military discharge in England and the Guard proved an economic means to achieve this. The entire Guard was to report to the Camp Commandant at Featherston on 6 January.<sup>29</sup> Although confidential, the names of successful applicants, who were told on 2 January, appeared in South Island newspapers almost immediately<sup>30</sup>.

The opportunity to participate in an apparently pleasant overseas jaunt was not lost on others. For instance, the existing Internment Camp Guards were very interested. On 8 January, Major Brunt wrote on their behalf, stating that some had seen over three years active overseas service, and that they deserved consideration also<sup>31</sup>. The resulting correspondence suggests that using existing Guard staff had simply not dawned on the planners. The Director of Recruiting had received no instructions on this point and by 14 January a single vacancy remained. In the meantime, though, the embarkation date was postponed indefinitely<sup>32</sup>. Major C.E. Kemp, the Assistant Adjutant General, subsequently pointed out that the time spent recruiting a new Guard from the various Military Districts, “must have taken infinitely longer” than the time required to call for applications from the existing Guard. He added:

The whole matter seems to have been handled in a most casual manner and there will be a great deal of dissatisfaction amongst men twice qualified, firstly as returned men and secondly as experienced members of the P.O.W. Guard, if they are given no opportunity<sup>33</sup>.

Even this did not work in the “old” Guard’s favour. On 24 January the Provost Marshall advised Andrews that the last vacancy was filled, albeit by mistake. He also explained that the “old” Guard could not be spared, “as men are not obtainable to replace them, and for that reason it was deemed inadvisable to send them overseas”<sup>34</sup>. Despite this, at least one Repatriation guard, Private Tamihana Kainga, a Gallipoli veteran who had lost an eye at Anzac Cove, also served on Somes. His service as a guard began in October 1917 and lasted until the internees reached Rotterdam<sup>35</sup>.

The officer chosen to head the Repatriation Guard was accountant, Major George Raymond Blackett MC. In 1919, Colonel R.A. Chaffey, Commander of the Canterbury Military District, described how the “quick-brained” Blackett, a Territorial Officer, took a leading part in organising and dispatching Nelson District’s Main Body contingent<sup>36</sup>. Blackett won the Military Cross at Gallipoli - possibly for going behind enemy lines disguised as a Turk - before suffering heatstroke and ongoing headaches in early 1917, due to the Egyptian sun. After recuperating in England, he returned to New Zealand in 1917 and was discharged from the NZEF<sup>37</sup>. He subsequently served in several capacities in the Canterbury Military District before reporting for service at Featherston on 24 January<sup>38</sup>.

The next day Lieutenant Alfred Onslow Glasse MC, an electrical engineer, also reported for duty at Featherston. He enlisted in the British section of the NZEF in 1914, and had served in Gallipoli, Egypt and Western Europe (where he gained his MC in 1917), prior to his arrival in New Zealand in December 1918. As he was to be discharged, he asked on 10 January to be returned to Britain first. Consequently he found himself attached to the Repatriation Guard with the belief that he would sail in about a week. When repatriation was delayed, Glasse asked to be relieved of the duty and sent to Britain as soon as possible due to civilian employment needs. After a dispute, though, his current employer, the NZEF, refused to release him in order to save paying some other officer’s two-way trip<sup>39</sup>.

By late January 1919 - and in stark contrast to Somes’ three years with a single officer - the Featherston Internment Camp boasted three majors and two lieutenants, who between them held three Military Crosses. On 1 February, Captain Cross suggested to Osburne-Lilly that “there seems to be now an unnecessary number of officers attached for duty with the Featherston Internment Camp.” Osburne-Lilly responded by recommending that Glasse transfer to Narrow Neck, in place of its then Second-in-Command, to familiarise him with its internees. Evidence suggests Glasse remained at Featherston<sup>40</sup>.

One can imagine that running a prisoner of war camp differed somewhat from Brunt's previous duties, but the Guard that came from *Somes* were perhaps Brunt's greatest cause for shock. On 18 December 1918, Colonel Macdonald, Featherston's Commandant, described to Headquarters the Guard - some 45 men - that he had inherited. Of this number 28 were privates, including a batman, a cook, 2 clerks and 10 medically unfit, leaving only 14 available for sentry duty. Meanwhile the seven sentry posts required 21 men for each daily shift. He considered many of the Guard quite unsuitable for guarding the type of men interned there<sup>41</sup>.

On 30 December 1918 Brunt himself informed Macdonald of the "present unsatisfactory condition" of the Guard. Of the 52 men he described as having transferred from *Somes*, most were either too old or of exceptionally poor physic, with several being of doubtful character. Another 32 temporary staff acquired from around the country, were "quite untrained, and in many cases physically incapable of carrying on." His list went on, indicating that an audit of the Quartermaster Sergeant's books and stores was underway pending that man's replacement. Of the 22 men shown as available for guard duty, eight were too old for the task and Lance Corporals were being used. Of these, one private found sleeping in his sentry box four nights earlier, proved instead to have collapsed with heart disease and goitre. The staff of 89 included 50 privates, a probable deserter and another in detention. Brunt sought a staff of 93, including 70 privates<sup>42</sup>.

On 10 January 1919, as requested by Brunt, Karl Joosten provided a list of 145 internees desiring repatriation. These were in addition to 83 seamen already selected. Perhaps as a form of bribe to encourage men to agree to be repatriated, internees accepting the offer were also offered brief paroles to visit former home towns to sort out personal matters. Eighteen requested this parole, however, the catch was that they were expected to pay both their costs and also those of their military escort. Joosten considered this condition unfair, given the extent of their poverty due to internment. As a means to assist them, he requested that they be permitted to travel alone, and at government expense. After all some had resided in New Zealand for many years and peace would be assured before they reached home<sup>43</sup>. Meanwhile, both Joosten and Eilender (who was unmarried) had signed written statements requesting repatriation, however, Joosten added that he

expected the New Zealand Government to pay first-class fares for his family. He also wanted a month in Christchurch to settle his affairs.

Colonel Gibbon released the names of seventeen men who were permitted to take this parole on 30 January. Their destinations ranged from Auckland to Otago and their period of release ranged between five and, in two cases, twenty-one days<sup>44</sup>. The Defence Department refused to grant free fares, forcing four of seven men who declined the offer, to do so for financial reasons. Another refused to pay his own expenses to Auckland, even though he had nearly £500 in the bank. The sixth, Wilhelm Lattermann, owned a farm in Otago and proved not to have even asked for repatriation. The seventh, Conrad Nickel, no longer wanted his five days in Wellington as he considered it no longer necessary<sup>45</sup>. Nickel had planned to take his English-born wife, Elizabeth, and daughters back to Germany. However, she refused:

Under any consideration (to go) as I have two children to study and look after which I have done this last two years without any help from him.

She added that she did not want her children to go to Germany and that Nickel had “not thought fit” to reply to her previous letter to him<sup>46</sup>. Even in February Nickel still thought he could persuade her to change her mind<sup>47</sup>.

N.A. (Alfred) Nathan of Auckland, became the Acting Honorary Swiss Consul in late 1918 or early 1919. On 15 January, Joosten congratulated him on his new role and, along with general business regarding money distribution, Joosten also asked him to contact the Government regarding the internees’ release. He explained that the daily papers of 13 January had said:

It is officially announced (that) the military authorities have now decided that it is no longer necessary to retain enemy civilians, therefore the Deportation (from Britain) began on January 6th when 750 sailed for Germany.

Why then were men being detained in the Antipodes, he asked. Hinting at the growing frustration at the lack of information made available to them, the internees even offered to pay any costs incurred by Nathan through cabling the Swiss Minister in London<sup>48</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> K. to W.H. Pugh, 5/12/1918. AAAB 449/52a Complaints by POWs to American and Swiss Consuls. (NA)

<sup>2</sup> EP 10/12/1919 7(6)

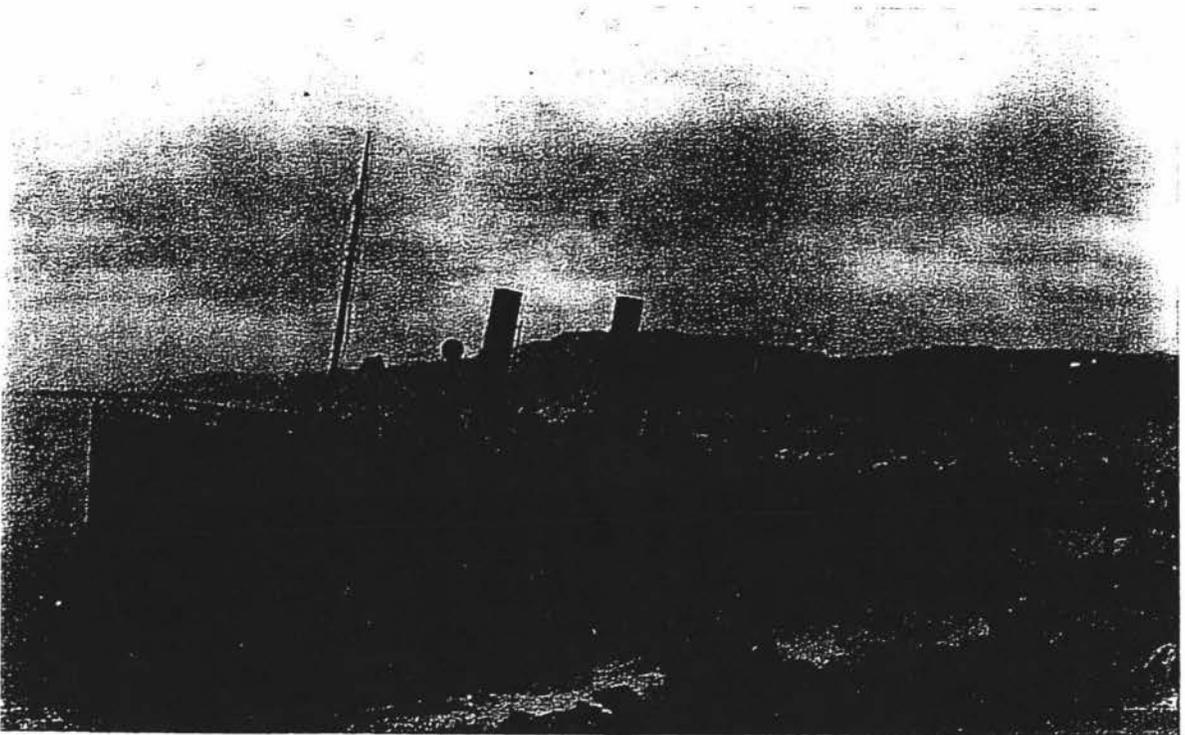
- <sup>3</sup> K. Joosten to Sir James Allen, 11/12/1918. AAAB 449/52a (NA). Also *Wairarapa Daily Times* 14/12/1918 5(1)
- <sup>4</sup> Director of Personal Services to Chief of General Staff, 17/12/1918, endorsed by Director of Medical Services, 20/12/1918. AAAB 449/52a (NA)
- <sup>5</sup> ES 11/12/1918 3(4). FS 13/12/1918 4(5)
- <sup>6</sup> ES 11/12/1918 3(4)
- <sup>7</sup> Director of Personal Services to Adjutant General (received 3/8/1918). AD 1 12/84. Water Supply, Somes Island (NA)
- <sup>8</sup> Wilhelm Otteng to Commandant, Featherston Camp, 17/12/1918. AAAB 482/32g, Otteng, W. (NA)
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> EP 14/12/1918 7(9)
- <sup>11</sup> e.g. Time Sheet, 16/1/1919. AAAB 482/11 Oelsdatter, A. Major Brunt to Swiss Consul, 3/2/1919. AAAB 482/2c, Hussler, A. (NA)
- <sup>12</sup> FS 17/12/1918 2(7)
- <sup>13</sup> *Auckland Weekly News* (AWN) 26/12/1918, p. 32.
- <sup>14</sup> Proceeds of a Medical Board, 16/12/1918, Featherston. No. 7118, Matheson (Personnel Archive, NZDF)
- <sup>15</sup> Lieut-Col. R.W. Tate to D.O.A., 2/1/1919. No. 7118, Matheson (Personnel Archive, NZDF)
- <sup>16</sup> Col. C.R. Macdonald to Headquarters, Wgtn., 18/12/1918. Lieut. L. Parkinson to Camp Commandant, Featherston, 26/12/1918. Col. C.R. Macdonald to Headquarters, Wgtn., 11/2/1919. No. 7/386 Parkinson, L. (Personnel Archive, NZDF)
- <sup>17</sup> No. 7118, Matheson (Personnel Archive, NZDF)
- <sup>18</sup> Chris Pugsley, 'William George Malone 1859-1915' in Department of Internal Affairs, *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, Vol. 3 (Auckland, 1996). pp. 326-8
- <sup>19</sup> Extract from General Richardson's report, 4/10/1916. No. 10/659, Brunt, Major J.W. (Personnel Archive, NZDF)
- <sup>20</sup> Col. N.P. Adams (former Commandant at Featherston M.C.) to Major Brunt, 5/12/1918, and other documents. No. 10/659, Brunt (Personnel Archive, NZDF)
- <sup>21</sup> Col. C.M. Gibbon to Commissioner of Police and Under-Secretary of Dept. of Internal Affairs. AD 1 59/156, POW Repatriation (NA)
- <sup>22</sup> Major General A.W. Robin to Minister of Defence, 11/12/1918. AD 1 59/156 (NA)
- <sup>23</sup> Major Matheson to Director of Personal Services, 1/12/1918. AD 1 59/156 (NA)
- <sup>24</sup> Col. C.M. Gibbon to Camp Commandant, 20/11/1918. Col. Gibbon to Minister of Defence, 17/1/1919. AAAB 482/57a, Joosten, K. (NA)
- <sup>25</sup> James Findlay to Major H.C. Nutsford, 18/12/1918. AD 1 59/156 (NA)
- <sup>26</sup> Col. Gibbon to Naval Adviser, 8/1/1919. Admiralty to Senior Naval Adviser, N.Z., 4/1/1919. AD 1 59/156 (NA)
- <sup>27</sup> Admiralty, London, to Senior Naval Officer, Wgtn., 10/1/1919. AD 1 59/156 (NA)
- <sup>28</sup> Director of Recruiting to Headquarters, All Military Districts, 27/12/1918. AD 1, 59/156/11 Guard, POW Repatriation (NA)
- <sup>29</sup> Director of Recruiting to Camp Commandant, Featherston, 4/6/1919. AD 1, 59/156/11 (NA)
- <sup>30</sup> Director of Recruiting to Adjutant General, Wgtn. c4/1/1919. AD 1 59/156 (NA)
- <sup>31</sup> Major Brunt to Director of Personal Services, 8/1/1919. AD 1, 59/156/11 (NA)
- <sup>32</sup> Director of Recruiting to A.A.G., 14/1/1919. AD 1, 59/156/11 (NA)
- <sup>33</sup> A.A.G. to Provost Marshall, 20/1/1919. AD 1, 59/156/11 (NA)
- <sup>34</sup> Provost Marshall to A.A.G., 24/1/1919. Major-General A.U. Robin to Minister of Defence, 30/1/1919. AD 1, 59/156/11 (NA)
- <sup>35</sup> Service Record. No. 16/8 Kainga, Pvt. T. (Personnel Archive, NZDF)
- <sup>36</sup> Col. R.A. Chaffy to whom it may concern, 9/1/1919. No. 7/170, Blackett, Major G.R. (Personnel Archive, NZDF)
- <sup>37</sup> Career of Major G.R. Blackett prepared by Personnel Archive, 1986. Also Mrs T. Evitt (daughter) to Personnel Archive, 29/4/1996. No. 7/170, Blackett (Personnel Archive, NZDF)
- <sup>38</sup> Captain A.J. Cross, Director of Organisation, to Camp Commandant, Featherston, 24/1/1919. No. 7/170, Blackett (Personnel Archive, NZDF)
- <sup>39</sup> Lieut. A.O. Glasse to Camp Commandant, Featherston, 25/2/1919. Capt. Cross to A.A.G, 1/3/1919. Major C.E. Andrews, Assistant Adjutant General, to G.O.C., 5/3/1919. No. 4/74A, Glasse, Lieut. A.O. (Personnel Archive, NZDF)

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- <sup>40</sup> Capt. A.G. Cross to Director of Personal Services, 1/2/1919. Major Osburne-Lilly to D.O.A., 7/2/1919. No. 7118, Matheson (Personnel Archive, NZDF). Also EP 14/5/1919 7(8)
- <sup>41</sup> Col. C.R. Macdonald to Headquarters, N.Z. Military Forces, 18 December 1918. AD 1 15/142, Guards, POW Internment Camp (NA)
- <sup>42</sup> Major Brunt to Camp Commandant, Featherston, 30/12/1918. AD 1 15/142 (NA)
- <sup>43</sup> K. Joosten to Major Brunt, 10/1/1919. AD 1 59/156 (NA)
- <sup>44</sup> Col. C.M. Gibbon to Commissioner of Police, 30/1/1919. AAAB 482/24e, Nickel, C. (NA)
- <sup>45</sup> Major Brunt to Chief of General Staff, 4/3/1919. AAAB 482/24e (NA)
- <sup>46</sup> Mrs C. Nickel to Commandant, Featherston Internment Camp, 6/1/1919. AAAB 482/24e (NA)
- <sup>47</sup> C. Nickel to Major Brunt, 14/2/1919. Major Brunt to Chief of General Staff, 17/2/1919. AAAB 482/24e (NA)
- <sup>48</sup> K. Joosten to N.A. Nathan, 15/1/1919. AD 1 59/156 (NA)



(Above) Pack-up time on *Somes* on the morning of 14 December 1918. Note the violin case suggesting the man holding it is a member of the Bavarian String Band.

(Below) The internees board the *SS Duchess* on 14 December 1918, on the first leg of their journey to Featherston Internment Camp. (Both photos: Molly Smith, Dargaville. This copy made available by the Department of Conservation, Wellington Conservancy)



## XIV

**The New Regime**

Probably the first significant clash between the internees and Brunt began on 15 January as a result of two internees skylarking in the camp hospital. When challenged, one gave an obviously inexperienced guard another internee's name. The resulting charge, therefore, was laid against the wrong person until an informer revealed the truth. At first sentenced to seven days' fatigue, when they failed to comply they received seven days in the cells on No. 2 diet. The other internees thought that the punishment was excessive and that the pair should first have been arrested. As a result, Joosten wrote to Nathan on behalf of the Camp Committee. The Committee felt Brunt, whom they assumed had no experience in dealing with "foreigners", perhaps thought men's statements were untruthful because they spoke English hesitantly. One of the pair was very deaf and therefore spoke loudly. He also tended to be suspicious<sup>1</sup>.

Brunt angrily retaliated by forwarding a copy of Joosten's letter to Osburne-Lilly, attacking Joosten's right to challenge his impartiality. He claimed that Joosten's forwardness was a result of the recent decision to drop Major Matheson's October 1918 action against him. Adding that if Joosten and the Committee were permitted to reopen cases he had dealt with or to criticise his judgment, he said: "it will be impossible for me to have any semblance to discipline in this Camp."

Colonel Macdonald, in support of Brunt's position (and obviously unaware of standard procedures on Somes), remarked that "an aggrieved man naturally has the right to appeal, just as the private soldier has the right." He added that the two prisoners could each have appealed on their own behalf. Macdonald sought permission to inform Joosten of correct procedures and to forbid him from forming a committee to discuss such grievances. The matter travelled up the chain of command to Colonel Gibbon, who ordered that Joosten's letter be stopped and suggested sending him to Narrow Neck, without giving him any warning<sup>2</sup>.

Accordingly, on 3 February, Osburne-Lilly issued instructions for Joosten's immediate transfer to Narrow Neck. The general opinion of the authorities was that nothing would be gained by attempting to stop him acting as spokesman for the other internees, as they looked up to him as an influential superior due to his having been German Consul. Osburne-Lilly also considered that he would not be regarded as a superior by Narrow Neck's internees. Joosten was only to have enough warning to allow him to pack his belongings<sup>3</sup>.

On 6 February, and oblivious of the plans being made for him, Joosten again wrote to Nathan inquiring into his lack of response. He also withdrew a statement in his earlier letter, having discovered the men concerned were arrested, after refusing to work outside their compound without free consent or payment. Their compound (which then contained over 300 men) was "hardly" three acres, he said, and this included eight hutments, fenced off with barbed wire from the rest of the camp. The ground was entirely covered with rough, loose shingle, and as most internees had poor footwear, walking for any time proved difficult. Sometimes, it appears, suddenly proved to have had good points. He could not understand why they remained imprisoned when civilian and military prisoners in the war zone were now free. He said the inmates felt they were the subject of retaliatory measures. Joosten also complained that the previous day the guards had manhandled his niece at the camp. They had then forbidden her to see either of the Joosten brothers, when she brought his (Karl's) children to visit.

Apparently Joosten's niece, Miss Marpmann, disobeyed orders she considered unfair (namely that she could not speak to her uncles). The guards' over-reaction was because they thought she attempted to photograph the compound during her previous visit. Brunt accepted that the internees found the confinement after Sometimes to be "irksome", but considered their accommodation "vastly superior to that provided in Europe." In his cover letter to Osburne-Lilly, he agreed with Joosten on the footwear problem, but pointed out that all internees should have received a full issue of clothing just before they left Sometimes. The matter was postponed when the internees refused to appoint squadleaders, as required by Regulations. The clothing issue occurred just after the transfer<sup>4</sup>.

Brunt's own views on life as an internment camp commandant survive in a light-hearted personal letter to Captain Cross regarding long service medals:

Please don't ask any questions about my "Hunnery", as my replies might burn the paper. However am keeping right end up and trust you are doing the same<sup>5</sup>.

Joosten's transfer occurred on 15 February<sup>6</sup>. The same day Lothar Eilender, formerly secretary to Auckland's German Consul, advised the Swiss Consul that he was the new Camp Spokesman. He also wrote to the Swiss Minister in London, asking why the exchange of prisoners and liberation of civilians was safe in Europe, while in New Zealand they could see no sign that their release was imminent. A week later he again wrote to the Swiss Consul, reminding him that it was over a year since a consul last visited, even though former consul Pugh had promised to visit the previous February<sup>7</sup>.

When finally Nathan replied, stating that he could not spare time solely to visit Featherston his letter evidently stung:

But should I be in the South on some future occasion and have an opportunity to visit the Camp I will do my best to do so<sup>8</sup>.

Eilender's reply expressed astonishment at Nathan's remarks and at his irritation at being "troubled with unnecessary or overmuch correspondence," from Joosten and himself. Eilender also somewhat sarcastically expressed regret that Nathan's workload interfered so much with his consular obligations (Nathan appears to be a member of the L.D. Nathan family). He reminded him that he was the only person available to assist them to "obtain what civil rights we still have left." Eilender concluded by expressing hope that Nathan would send them the money from the German Government Relief Fund for Destitute Civilians, as they had received nothing for two months. Pugh, on the other hand, had made his quarterly payments promptly and to a set time frame.

Before Eilender's letter was sent, he learned that F.J. Sanderson was now Acting Swiss Consul, however, Brunt decided to send him Eilender's "dictatorial" letter to show "a little of the spirit that has to be contended with"<sup>9</sup>. Under the circumstances though, it is hard to imagine how else any reasonable person in a similar situation might have acted.

In February 1919, a nation-wide newspaper advertising campaign began to recruit 36 suitable guards. Men aged between 19 and 50, with preference given to returned soldiers, were invited to work on Home Service as military police. Incentives included free board and lodgings; clothing, boots and medical attention. Payment included a new improved 7/6 per day for single men and 9/- for married men. They must also pass a medical test<sup>10</sup>. The transformation from “guard” to “military police” occurred due to guard dissatisfaction after higher-paid military police were brought into the various prisoner of war and military detention camps to assist their guards. Existing guards would become military police if they wished and if they were deemed suitable, however, any who objected would ultimately be replaced<sup>11</sup>.

Despite assistance from the Repatriation Guard, the camp’s manpower dilemma continued. By late March, the regular Guard numbered 77, six of whom awaited removal and 70 of whom were now military police. Brunt remained dissatisfied with the type of men he received. He asked the Military Police’s Provost Marshal to ensure those doing the selecting employed “only men of good steady character”, and preferably those with some previous experience in guard duties. Another round of advertisements in April saw the arrival of eighteen men, albeit that while nine had “very good” characters, five were only “fair”<sup>12</sup>.

Scrutiny of one third of all internee files indicates that the few punishments meted out by Brunt differed markedly to those of Matheson. Bearing in mind that the war was effectively over and both internees and guards were simply marking time, it is interesting that being late for Roll Call or accidentally breaking a window now warranted only “admonishment”<sup>13</sup>. For breaking the aforementioned window, a shovel and other Government property, Brunt required that internees pay for the damaged goods, a tactic that clearly worked<sup>14</sup>. However, breaking a light bulb with a broom while scaring cats, and then writing a letter of explanation, earned no punishment<sup>15</sup>.

To earn a stronger penalty, such as No. 2 Diet (bread and water), a few days confinement or several days’ fatigue, one let one’s squad sing banned songs, was insubordinate or stole two coils of tyre rubber<sup>16</sup>. To receive a punishment that resembled

Matheson's, one must do something rather more serious. Still, for dog-owners, such Austrian entertainer and artist, Rinaldo, Brunt was less tolerant than the (seemingly) dog-loving Matheson<sup>17</sup>. In June 1919, Brunt demanded the disposal of two trained dogs Rinaldo (interned 1914) had owned from their birth respectively three and four years earlier. In pleading their cause, Rinaldo said that they would help provide his future living and that there was no-one else to take care of them<sup>18</sup>. The result is unknown.

Featherston Internment Camp's barbed wire proved to be a far softer target for would-be escapees than Somes' moat. With the internees' clearly frustrated by the apparent lack of progress toward regaining their freedom, escape attempts were a natural result. On 16 April 1919, at first four and then six men proved to have vanished between the 7:00 am Roll Call and 11:45 am, when their absence was noticed. The guards took over two hours to discover how the men (Charles Hadler, Wilhelm Otteng, Martin Kock, Jan Slijm, Alfred Kraut and Walter Moormeister) escaped. As Hadler and Otteng were involved in the fake escape in August 1918, possibly the guards suspected this was another joke. Kraut, also, had been a participant in the July 1918 escape<sup>19</sup>.

At 2:00 pm, a guard noticed that a dividing wall between the internees' Dining Hall 3 (otherwise known as Hut 86) and the adjoining unused end of the hutment, had been cut with a key-hole saw. Next the exterior door at the other end of the hutment proved to have been forced open. The guards soon realised that the escape occurred during the 90 minutes in which Dining Hall 3 was open for breakfast. It was standard procedure to post a sentry outside the aforementioned exterior door, however, once breakfast was over and the dining hall was locked, the sentry left. On this occasion the escapees merely hid in the unused room until the sentry left and then walked out the door he had been guarding.

The resulting inquiry particularly criticised the fact that the internees retained their handcraft tools. Yet it did remark on the lack of supervision in the dining hall during meals, and on the fact that the hutment concerned was outside the barbed wire enclosure. Furthermore, it also remarked on the non-use of ball ammunition by sentries. Captain Irvine, then Second in Command, acknowledged during the inquiry that the internees'

knew that while the guards carried a rifle and bayonet, they did not carry live ammunition. Sentries on night shift (6:00 pm to 6:00 am) carried a Snider Carbine and five rounds of buckshot. Major General Robins endorsed the resulting report with the remark: "There is evidence of slackness which is not satisfactory"<sup>20</sup>.

The six slipped away and separated, but back at the camp at least one guard became rather too highly agitated. At about 5:15 pm, while the camp's five German cooks were eating their tea in No. 6 Cookhouse, Private Martin Murphy appeared and fired his gun at them (in this case a Snider Carbine loaded with buckshot) without warning or provocation. As he fired at point blank range, soldiers who witnessed the exchange wondered how he missed the cooks. The shocked cooks asked Eilender to seek assurance from Brunt that Murphy would no longer have access to firearms, as otherwise they felt they could not continue their work.

For his crime, Murphy spent seven days confined to barracks, a sentence for attempted multiple murder that seems incredibly mild under the circumstances, and especially in comparison with Paul Arnold's. In addition to venereal disease in 1918, the 43-year-old South African War veteran suffered a gunshot wound to his right thigh and forearm in France in 1917. As a result, his right hand was weak and he could not fully close it. Not too surprisingly, therefore, this shearer was unemployed until 13 March 1919, when he began guarding the countrymen of those who damaged his hand. Also somewhat surprisingly, when he left the camp on 28 June 1919, his character was described as "good"<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> K. Joosten to N.A. Nathan, 20/1/1919. AAAB 449/52a, Complaints by POWs to American and Swiss Consuls (NA)

<sup>2</sup> Major Brunt to Director of Personal Services, 23/1/1919. Col. C.A. Macdonald to Director of Personal Services, 23/1/1919. Director of Personal Services to Commandant, Featherston Military Camp, 28/1/1919. Director of Personal Services to Chief of General Staff, 28/1/1919, endorsed by Col. Gibbon, 29/1/1919. AAAB 449/52a (NA)

<sup>3</sup> Major Osburne-Lilly to Commandant, Featherston Military Camp, 3/2/1919. AAAB 482/57a, Joosten, K. (NA)

<sup>4</sup> K. Joosten to N.A. Nathan, 6/2/1919. Sgt. R. Laine to Major Brunt, 5/2/1919. Major Brunt to Director of Personal Services, 13/2/1919. AAAB 449/52a (NA)

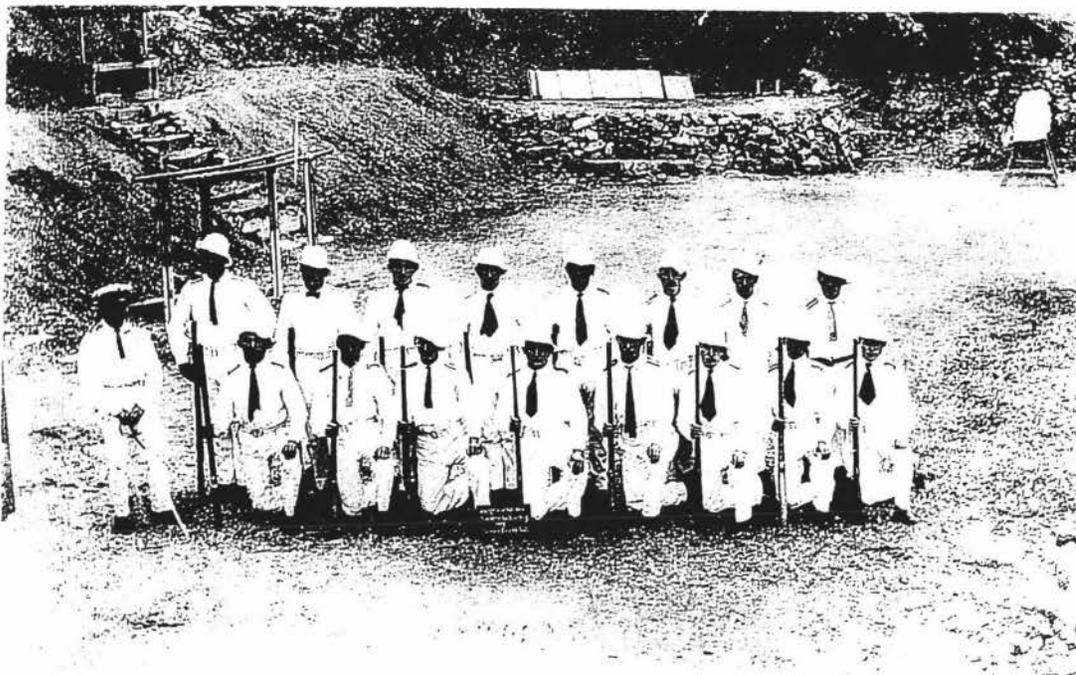
<sup>5</sup> Major Brunt to Capt. Cross, 7/2/1919. No. 10/659, Brunt (Personnel Archive, NZDF)

<sup>6</sup> Major Brunt to Director of Personal Services, 15/2/1919. AAAB 482/57a (NA)

<sup>7</sup> L. Eilender to N.A. Nathan, 15/2/1919. L. Eilender to Swiss Minister, London, 25/2/1919. L. Eilender to N.A. Nathan, 25/2/1919. AAAB 449/52a (NA)

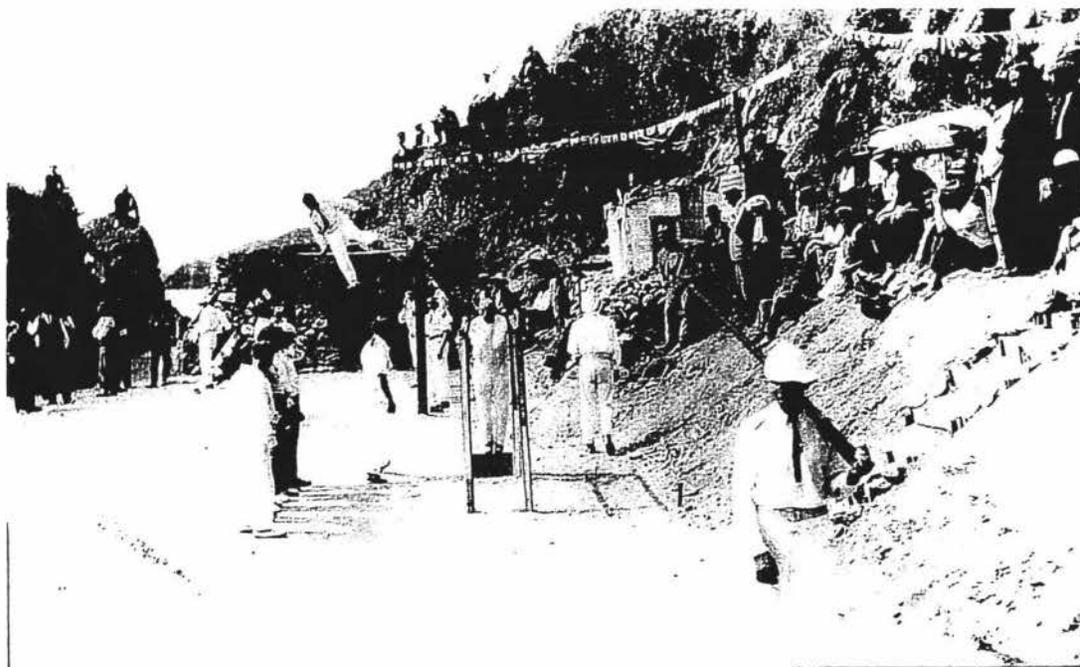
<sup>8</sup> Alfred Nathan to R. Eilender, 4/3/1919. AAAB 482/50I, Eilender, R.L. (NA)

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- <sup>9</sup> L. Eilender to N.A. Nathan, endorsed to F.J. Sanderson, 17/3/1919. Major Brunt to Director of Personal Services, 24/3/1919. AAAB 449/52a (NA)
- <sup>10</sup> Capt. D. Cosgrove, Director of Recruiting, to Officers Commanding Districts, 31/1/1919. AD 1 15/142, Guards, POW Internment Camp (NA)
- <sup>11</sup> Major Osburne-Lilly to D.F.S., 15/1/1919. Major C.E. Andrew to G.O.C., endorsed 20/1/1919. Major C.E. Andrew to All Camp Commandants (and others), 23/1/1919. AD 1 15/142 (NA)
- <sup>12</sup> Major Brunt to Provost Marshal, 21/3/1919. Also list of men accepted for duty between 26/4/1919 and 1/5/1919. AD 1 15/142 (NA)
- <sup>13</sup> e.g. AAAB 482/36f, Petersen, H. AAAB 482/38a, Hecht, E. AAAB 482/32L, Fritz, K. (NA)
- <sup>14</sup> e.g. AAAB 482/65f, Jakabsen, J. (NA)
- <sup>15</sup> AAAB 482/37b, Schumacher, F. (NA)
- <sup>16</sup> e.g. Respectively, AAAB 482/36g, Rinaldo, Z. AAAB 482/39a, Klock, O. AAAB 482/13a, Wenold, W. (NA)
- <sup>17</sup> EP 24/8/1914 9(6) This article refers to three Pomeranian dogs then at the camp.
- <sup>18</sup> Zahn Rinaldo to Major Brunt, 2/6/1919. AAAB 482/36g, Rinaldo, Z. (NA). Also photo AWN 20/4/1916, p. 41.
- <sup>19</sup> AD 1 59/170, Escape - POW from Featherston Camp, 16/4/1919 (NA)
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> L. Eilender to Major Brunt, 16/6/1919. AAAB 482/2f, Necknikowski, A. (NA). No. 6/301, Murphy, Pvt. M. (Personnel Archive, NZDF)



**(Above)** Internees pose on their waterfront exercise ground in the course of celebrating Kaiser Wilhelm II's birthday on about 27 January 1917. The display board reads "Young Germany. Kaiser's Birthday, 1917, Somes Island, N.Z." The internees made their wooden guns and uniforms. Note the sports equipment and stage in the background, while on the upper left a rather hopeful internee sits in his home-made zeppelin. This and other photos used here were taken by Harry Hart, a family member of Mr S. Hart who ran the Somes Island lighthouse. (Photo: F-112229-1/2, R. Hart Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library)

**(Below)** A demonstration of the internees' sporting prowess during the Kaiser's Birthday celebrations on about 27 January 1917. Note zeppelin No. Z606 on the upper right. (Photo: F-112228-1/2, R. Hart Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library)



## XV

**Freedom**

The effects of war impacted on the Union Steam Ship Company's two-year-old mail steamer *Willochra*, in August 1914, with the indefinite postponement of a scheduled trip from Wellington to San Francisco<sup>1</sup>. A varied war career brought the ship to public attention a few times. For example, in May 1916 the 7,784 ton vessel created national news by arriving at Port Chalmers with smallpox aboard. The 233 invalid soldiers it carried then spent 15 days on Quarantine Island<sup>2</sup>. The wounded Lieutenant Jack arrived home aboard it in September 1916<sup>3</sup>, then in April 1918 Major Matheson watched his son Norman sail for France aboard the ship<sup>4</sup>.

Later in 1918, after flitting around the Atlantic and Indian Ocean, the ship was about to leave Southampton for America when the Armistice was signed. Instead it sailed for Rotterdam to collect British prisoners of war. When it arrived off the river Humber - the entrance to Hull - with the first load of released prisoners, the *Willochra* was surrounded by trawlers and small boats. Flags flew from every ship in port and on almost every building in the town, while whistles and sirens blew. As the ship steamed up river "countless" aeroplanes flew over, their pilots dropping messages of good cheer to the troops on the deck. Evidently Hull had never before experienced such as "joyful demonstration". The *Willochra*, along with four or five Danish ships, delivered home Britain's able-bodied ex-prisoners of war (sick ones travelled by hospital ship). With this job completed, and after some repairs, the ship and over 1,000 New Zealand troops arrived in Wellington on 14 April 1919<sup>5</sup>.

In late March, Major Nutsford, Director of Movements and Quartering, suggested using the *Willochra* for the internee repatriation. Despite the proposal travelling to Britain for permission, no-one bothered to tell the internees. Meanwhile, Major Blackett, his "typiste" and the borrowed Sergeant Palmer, worked their way through a mountain of paperwork at Headquarters. Their task included constructing the prisoner of war files used for this study, as well as sorting out claims for money and property<sup>6</sup>.

As the voyage drew closer, piles of applications arrived from would-be guards. One came from Sergeant Joseph W. Trotter, whose doctor had advised a sea trip due to his failing health. Trotter's career included two years in the Military Police at Wellington and two stints on *Somes* between April 1915 and April 1916, and (after being discharged from the Military Police for misconduct the previous month) between February 1918 and May 1918<sup>7</sup>. Trotter's activities included borrowing 30/- from an internee and "forgetting" to repay it<sup>8</sup>. His application proved unsuccessful.

On 16 April the *Evening Post* published the report the internees craved. They were to sail aboard the *Willochra* on 29 April. It is ironic that the six aforementioned internees went to the trouble of escaping only hours earlier, while the guard shot at the German cooks about the time Wellingtonians read of the planned repatriation in their evening papers. The following day the *Evening Post* reported the escape, albeit assuming they escaped to avoid repatriation. Still, the paper appeared oblivious to the shooting. Preparations were soon underway for an official inquiry "to ascertain what blame, if any, attaches to the camp staff in connection with the incident"<sup>9</sup>.

Jan Slijm's freedom ended on Saturday night, 19 April, when he visited a Martinborough hotel for a drink. As his picture was on the wall, he was soon recognised and arrested. Erroneously described as the only fluent English-speaker in the group, the authorities calculated that the rest were nearby. On 22 April, William Otteng and Walter Moormeister (who grew up in South Africa and who spoke fluent English without a trace of a German accent<sup>10</sup>) surrendered to Hawera's police after discovering they were due for repatriation on the 29th. They said they had been very disappointed and disgusted that the January "repatriation" did not eventuate, and escaped to bring matters to a head. On 21 April Martin Koch called at Martinborough Police Station, where he announced that he was one of the escaped Germans and wished to give himself up<sup>11</sup>. Later he told the guards that the others were near Martinborough<sup>12</sup>. In fact, it was the Hastings police who arrested the remaining two, Carl Hadler and Alfred Kraut, on 25 April. For their trouble they all received 21 day confinement and No. 2 Diet<sup>13</sup>.

On 22 April, a cable from Britain's Secretary of State advised that as the Bolsheviks had captured Odessa, internees could no longer be repatriated by that route<sup>14</sup>. As a result, on 8 May Brunt received instructions to withdraw the Russian internees, Olaf Halinen, Jan Jakabsen, Arthur Muravleff and Paul Nester from the voyage<sup>15</sup>.

While some internees were removed from the passenger list (albeit that they did not necessarily wish to be withdrawn), others who had spent part or all of the war on parole grabbed the chance to seek repatriation. Particularly interested were a large number of Dalmatians who doubtless revelled at the chance of a free trip home. The majority of Dalmatians, who were then "arrested" for technical reasons, were interned at Narrow Neck. They did, however, retain the right to change their mind and withdraw from the trip, provided they paid any costs incurred during their brief internment. In all 75 Dalmatian parolees, and one Hungarian, joined the party, of whom 40 were returning to wives and children. Thirteen German men, the wives and children of three of them and a single woman, also took this opportunity to return home<sup>16</sup>.

On the eve of their departure and upon instructions from the Camp Committee, Eilender wrote to the current Acting Swiss Consul, Alexander Wright Donald, of Auckland. He said they had no doubt that the various consuls tried to do their best for the internees, but that they were hampered for two reasons. Firstly the consuls were British citizens and businessmen "in an anomalous not to say precarious position, and could therefore not act in the same incisive way" that a "neutral, independent and really unbiased representative" could. The second reason was "the unnecessary obstructions which were put in their way by the N.Z. Military Authorities most likely for the reason to conceal the mismanagement under which we had to suffer for four years on Somes Island." Eilender credited former consul Pugh with having assisted with having helped cause the Royal Commission, but added: "We do not know the results of this inquiry, in any case it resulted in little improvement of our disgraceful conditions." Eilender concluded with a thinly veiled threat:

But our own people and others shall hear from us by word and pen the full account of the gentlemanly way in which the people of New Zealand treated the men who were unfortunate enough to be within their reach at the outbreak of war<sup>17</sup>.

Given the reality of conditions in their wartorn and defeated homeland, possibly they hesitated to do this when the chance finally arose. Realistically, public and Governmental sympathy for them might also have been limited.

The 242 Featherston internees duly arrived at Glasgow Wharf, Wellington, by special train at 1:35 pm, on 14 May. There they “quietly” boarded the ship. Being unaware of the internees’ arrival time, few members of the public were there, those present mostly being Harbour Board officials. On the other hand, there were many armed guards and civil police, including an officer, seven NCOs and 29 men, all returned soldiers who had accompanied the internees. Once detrained, the internees lined up, four deep, between the train and the ship. The guards, with bayonets fixed (but with bullet status unknown), stood around them. At 1:50 pm, in single file, the internees mounted the gangway and as each stepped aboard, his name was checked off the list. The *Evening Post* reporter described the men as “none to cheerful”, but showing no ill-will. Most wore denims with New Zealand military overcoats, the best dressed being the *Seeadler* men in their naval uniforms<sup>18</sup>.

After great excitement and general high spirits at Narrow Neck, as old friends were farewelled, the 168-member Auckland contingent set out for home. Described by the *Evening Post* as looking well-fed and healthy, they marched in perfect step toward the wharf:

The Germans had a much more pronounced military appearance than the Jugoslavs. As the latter marched out of the camp the Germans looked on in silence, but when the Germans left there were noisy farewells (from the around forty internees who remained).

Unlike the dowdy appearance of the other contingent, many Narrow Neck men wore new clothes and boots, while some first class prisoners carried gloves and canes. Von Luckner, displaying “almost a schoolboy excitement”, wore a new naval uniform, including four ribbons.<sup>19</sup>

Again these internees’ departure had remained relatively secret and few people saw their procession through Devonport. The senior prisoners, along with three German women and thirteen children were driven, while the majority walked. The Defence steamer *Lady*

*Roberts* then took them to Queen's Wharf, where they boarded their train<sup>20</sup>. The Auckland contingent arrived at Glasgow Wharf just before 3:00 pm and embarked without incident<sup>21</sup>.

The Chief of General Staff granted permission to Mrs Broglie, doubtless wife of Featherston internee Charles Nicholls-Broglie, to give a little memento to von Luckner on the wharf, provided Blackett intercepted and examined it first<sup>22</sup>. The *Evening Post* reported that after a brief conversation, she gave von Luckner a bunch of flowers<sup>23</sup>.

The *Willochra* pulled away from the wharf at 4:15 pm and anchored in the stream. The *Evening Post* recorded:

As the vessel drew away from the wharf one of the prisoners called out, "Good bye, New Zealand. I hope never to see you again." He was quickly taken charge of by his fellow prisoners, and beyond this there was no further incident.

The ship's crew, and especially the firemen, also "barracked" the prisoners as they went to their quarters. They laughingly made such remarks as "What about submarines now?" and "Where are the torpedoes?" The *Evening Post* viewed the *Willochra's* camouflage as a reminder to the internees, of the seriousness of wartime at sea<sup>24</sup>.

At 9:30 pm, the *Willochra* sailed for Sydney, but not before two prisoners, Theodor Bunz and Henry Albert Gönning<sup>25</sup>, both with high temperatures and suspected influenza, were removed to Wellington Hospital<sup>26</sup>. Although ten days later they returned to the dubious comforts of Featherston, it took two months before their property returned from the ship<sup>27</sup>.

The Repatriation Guard consisted of 40 men, including 29 privates and a sergeant who was to disembark at South Africa; four members of the New Zealand Medical Corps., one of whom listed his previous occupation as a slaughterman!; and Matron Ruth Gilmore of the New Zealand Army Nursing Service<sup>28</sup>. Contradicting the newspaper figures, Blackett subsequently reported that duplication of names on the embarkation roll and the non-appearance of five Dalmatians meant that 423 repatriates in fact left New Zealand. This increase from 410 who boarded the ship is probably explained by families associated with the Featherston men and also at least one internee rejoined the party at

Wellington after a brief parole<sup>29</sup>. Of the party, 304 were bound for Germany, while 119 were to be transshipped at Sydney<sup>30</sup>.

The voyage to Sydney was relatively uneventful. There was one case of high temperature. Another man, Petar Matisich, was committed to the cells for safe custody. It appears he was “mentally defective” and this situation was not unusual for him. Blackett also reported that discipline was quite satisfactory on the whole<sup>31</sup>.

The ship was due in Sydney on 18 May to collect 2,300 tons of coal<sup>32</sup>, deposit most of its non-German passengers, and then collect more German internees from Holdsworthy Concentration Camp. This simple transaction was not apparently to the liking of some of the Australian internees. Camp authorities discovered a fifty-yard-long tunnel out from one of their barracks, suggesting some preferred Australia to their homeland<sup>33</sup>.

Unifying the New Zealand and Australian contingents of both Guards and prisoners at Sydney, was not a simple process. For a start, three privates found themselves sent home for misconduct, and demobilisation without privileges. All three overstayed their leave in Sydney on 25 May, although one, who was Australian-born, claimed his extra 2½ hours occurred while farewelling his family who were leaving by train for Adelaide.<sup>34</sup> In addition, given the far greater numbers of “Australian” Germans who were to sail, the Australian authorities placed a senior officer over both Blackett and the commander of their own draft, much to Blackett’s apparent dismay<sup>35</sup>. New Zealand agreed to the Australian authorities taking control of the Guard, although Blackett retained his command of the New Zealand draft. The *Willochra*’s Australian Germans - some 600 men<sup>36</sup> - left Holdsworthy on 27 May.

On 28 May the ship sailed for Albany, Western Australia, where it recoaled. Its next stop, at Durban for recoaling, was due on 23 June<sup>37</sup>. However, the aforementioned Private Tamihana Kainga of the Repatriation Guard, forfeited five days pay for going absent without leave for 100 minutes at Durban on 21 June. This ex-N.Z. Maori Contingent member twice went AWOL from Somes also<sup>38</sup>.

The wives of four German internees lived in England and their husbands applied to return there. These men included seamen from British ships whose internment began when their ships reached New Zealand<sup>39</sup>. Although the New Zealand Government agreed to let them disembark in England if the British authorities permitted, the latter refused. On 19 August 1919, Louisa Bermann wrote to the British Government seeking information on her husband, Theodore, whom she had not heard from for over twelve months. Sir James Allen eventually informed her (via the Governor General) that her husband had finished up in Germany<sup>40</sup>.

The *Willochra* was due at Plymouth on 16 July, where it was to receive route instructions and collect £2,720/7/- that had been held in trust for the internees, or rather mostly for the Narrow Neck internees<sup>41</sup>. The same evening it sailed for Rotterdam<sup>42</sup>. As both Blackett's telegram and the corresponding instructions from New Zealand's Minister of Finance reached the High Commissioner on the 17th, a cable to Rotterdam on 18 July saw the no doubt somewhat concerned former internees paid<sup>43</sup>. After discharging its human cargo, the *Willochra* returned to England, where Blackett disembarked at London on 21 July<sup>44</sup>.

It has not been possible to document with certainty the *Willochra's* arrival at Rotterdam. However, in 1920 the *Evening Post* reported the arrival of a notorious batch of Holdsworthy internees at the port around the time the *Willochra* arrived. These men, known in Sydney as the Black Hand society, were allegedly a combination of the camp's lower socio-economic group and its criminal class. The Black Hand members preyed upon their wealthier and more orderly camp-mates, to the point where, in late 1916, their behaviour led to battles within the camp involving hundreds of men and where at least one death occurred. Although the guards stopped the fighting once or twice, both sides resented their interference. In the end the "orderly" side created its own police force who sorted the camp out. Then, after the authorities placed the Black Hand leaders in a separate compound (called "Sing Sing"), life became peaceful in the main compound.

When repatriation came around, the Black Hand men, and many others with less than ideal pasts, became extremely concerned about facing up to old crimes in their

homelands. Perhaps these were the men who attempted to tunnel their way out of Holdsworthy prior to the *Willochra's* departure? Their plans to disappear in Holland were thwarted in most cases, though, when the German police arrested them as they stepped ashore<sup>45</sup>.

The seized German ship *Tras-es-Montes* returned 1,200 Australian Germans a few weeks after the *Willochra*, and some of this batch did their best, albeit unsuccessfully, to avoid repatriation. Internees' wives also generally objected to going to Germany, however, Australian-born wives were not forced to go and - like New Zealand women in the same situation - faced divorce from their effectively deported husbands. Unlike New Zealand, though, where Karl Joosten, for example, was told to pay his family's fare if he wished them to return to Germany, Australia's German-born women had no right of appeal. As a result, a number of them successfully hid from the Australian officials. The *Tras-es-Montes* reached Rotterdam without mishap, despite intense anti-British and anti-Australian feelings displayed by the passengers. The internees disembarked to a hot meal and were then quickly dispatched by train to Germany. Australians on the ship departed convinced that Holland was strongly pro-German<sup>46</sup>.

For the former parolees amongst the *Willochra's* 108 Dalmatians<sup>47</sup>, a four-month stay at Holdsworthy Concentration Camp must have come as a shock. On 27 May, they, along with the Austrians, Bulgarians and Turk<sup>48</sup> arrived at Holdsworthy. There, despite plans to transship them almost immediately, they remained until sailing on the *Frankfurt* on 18 September 1919<sup>49</sup>.

Two Dalmatians, however, left the camp by other means. The first, Marko Rakich, perhaps due to ill-health in September, sailed on the *Valencia* on 10 October 1919. The second, stone mason, Joseph Kukulj, died on 28 June 1919 and was buried at Liverpool Cemetery<sup>50</sup>. Kukulj thus became one of 36 "Austrian" deaths at Holdsworthy between 1916 and 1919, of whom a stunning 27 died in June and July of 1919. An influenza epidemic then underway in Australia also struck the camp.

Given the many newcomers from New Zealand, combined with the likelihood that there was some influenza-like illness aboard the *Willochra*, it is possible that the New Zealand group brought a different strain of the epidemic or that they already had an immunity acquired in New Zealand. In addition, Mary Stenning, in her book, *Austrian Slavs, Internment Camps of Australia World War I*, on the Austrian internees, records also that commandant took the dead men's clothing and placed it in the camp store for use by other internees. Doubtless this transferred the illness to others. Dead internees' cash also found its way into use by the camp. The remaining deaths included one shot in February 1917 and a single death in late 1918, the period New Zealand associates with the epidemic<sup>51</sup>.

Most of Australasia's Austrian (and of course Bulgarian and Turkish) repatriates returned home on the *Frankfurt* or the *Valencia*. While total numbers of Bulgarians and Turks are not available here, Stenning documents 990 Austrian internees in all at Holdsworthy, mostly Slavs, including the 108 from New Zealand and 655 from Western Australia. Just as New Zealand's gumfields had attracted Dalmatians from the 1890s, Kalgoorlie's goldfield, discovered in 1894, achieved the same result. Australia - and in particular its labouring classes - appreciated the Dalmatians' loathing of their home government even less than did the New Zealanders. As a result, the Australian Government preferred interning them as "enemy aliens." It is noteworthy also, that in 1915, New Zealand-based Mr G.L. Scansie, editor of Australasia's only Croatian newspaper, the *Zora*, argued unsuccessfully for the freedom of Western Australian's Dalmatians<sup>52</sup>.

The *Frankfurt's* eventual destination is uncertain, however, in May 1919 the New Zealand Government understood these people would be shipped to Port Said<sup>53</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> ES 13/8/1914 4(6), 14/5/1919 7(8). Also Dom 17/7/1914, and Will Lawson, *Pacific Steamers* (Glasgow, 1927, this reprint, 1975). p. 150.

<sup>2</sup> EP 15/5/1916 2(7) Also photos in *Auckland Weekly News* 10/2/1916 p. 36 (Pt. Nicholson), 1/6/1916 p. 39 (Pt. Chalmers).

<sup>3</sup> No. 12/2339, Jack (Personnel Archive, NZDF)

<sup>4</sup> No. 71340, Matheson, N.M. (Personnel Archive, NZDF)

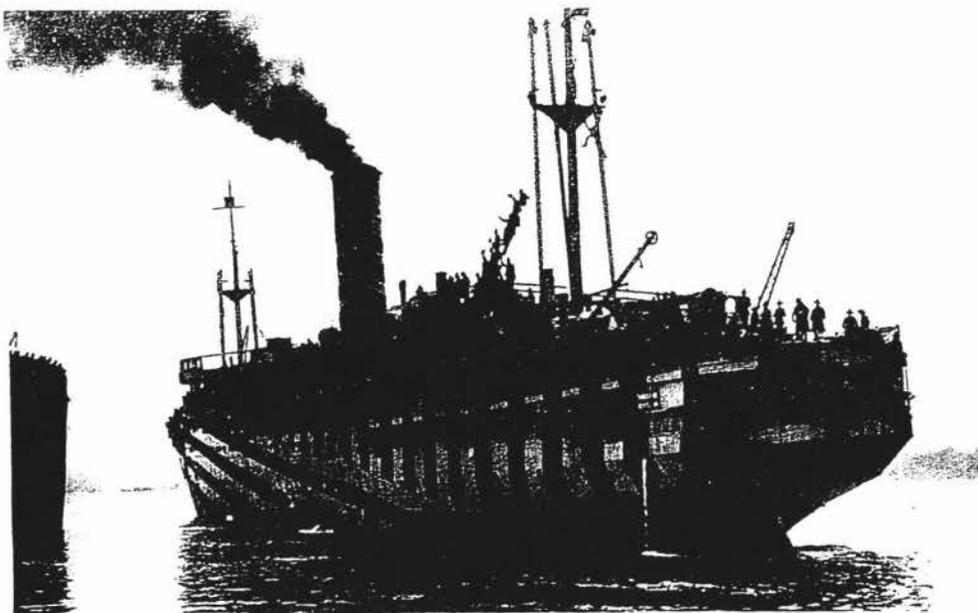
<sup>5</sup> EP 24/4/1919 7(9)

- <sup>6</sup> Major H.C. Nutsford to Chief of General Staff, 23/3/1919. Governor General to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1/4/1919. Major Brunt to Assistant Auditor General, 26/3/1919. Major Blackett to Commandant, Featherston Military Camp, 27/3/1919. AD 1 59/156/1 POW Repatriation (NA)
- <sup>7</sup> Sergeant J.W. Trotter to Minister of Defence, 26/4/1919. Provost Marshall to D.O.A., 30/4/1919. AD 1, 59/156/11 Guard, POW Repatriation (NA)
- <sup>8</sup> Edward Hecht to Sgt, Laine, 18/6/1918. AAAB 482/38a, Hecht, E. (NA)
- <sup>9</sup> EP 16/4/1919 7(6), 17/4/1919 7(6), 19/4/1919 5(7)
- <sup>10</sup> Report of Constable Thomas Kelly, Auckland, 2/12/1918. AAAB 482/13f, Moormeister, W. (NA)
- <sup>11</sup> Report of Constable Dick, Martinborough Police Station. AAAB 482/39d Kock, M. (NA) EP 23/4/1919 8(5)
- <sup>12</sup> Major Brunt to Chief of General Staff, 22/4/1919. AAAB 482/31a, Kraut, A. (NA)
- <sup>13</sup> Hastings Police to Featherston Internment Camp, telegram, 25/4/1919. AAAB 482/38g, Hadler, C. (NA)
- <sup>14</sup> Secretary of Defence, Melbourne, to the Secretary of Defence, Wellington, 11/5/1919. AD 1 59/156/2 POW Repatriation (NA)
- <sup>15</sup> Captain Proctor to Commandant, Featherston Military Camp, telegraph 8/5/1919. AD 1 59/156/2 (NA)
- <sup>16</sup> Telegram: Liverpool to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 12/4/1919, AD 1 59/156/1. Passenger list of *Willochra* prisoners of war 'on parole'. Col. H.R. Potter to H.Q., N.Z. Military Forces, Wgtn., 13/5/1919. AD 1 59/156/2. (NA)
- <sup>17</sup> L. Eilender to A.W. Donald, 12/5/1919. AAAB 482/50I, Eilender, L. (NA)
- <sup>18</sup> EP 14/5/1919 8(8)
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> Major on behalf of Chief of General Staff to Major Blackett, 12/5/1919. Provost Marshall to Chief of General Staff, 13/5/1919. AD 1 59/156/2 (NA)
- <sup>23</sup> EP 15/5/1919 7(3)
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>25</sup> Major Blackett, Sydney Harbour, to Headquarters, N.Z.M.F., Wellington, 23/5/1919. AD 1 56/156/3 POW Repatriation (NA)
- <sup>26</sup> EP 15/5/1919 7(3)
- <sup>27</sup> H.A. Gönning and T. Bunz, to Major Brunt 5/6/1919. Note to Gönning that goods returned 20/8/1919. AAAB 482/13d, Gönning, H. A. (NA)
- <sup>28</sup> Nominal Roll of Repatriation Guard of Prisoners of War, SS *Willochra*, left N.Z. 5/5/1919 [sic]. AD 1 59/156/11 (NA)
- <sup>29</sup> Chief of General Staff to Major Brunt, 7/5/1919. AAAB 482/41I, Kamper, F. K. (NA)
- <sup>30</sup> Major Blackett to Headquarters, N.Z.M.F., Wellington, 23/5/1919. AD 1 56/156/3 (NA)
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> Snr. Naval Officer N.Z. to Navy Officer, Melbourne and Captain in Charge, Sydney. Cable 13/5/1919. AD 1 56/156/3 (NA)
- <sup>33</sup> EP 20/5/1919 7(4)
- <sup>34</sup> Major G.R. Blackett to Adjutant-General, and attached summary of proceedings on 10/2949 Pvt. P. Gofton, 10/3042 Pvt. H.V. Norris and 3/448 Pvt. F.A. Stenson, 26/5/1919. AD 159/156/11 (NA) Also No. 3/448, Stenson, Pvt. F.A. (Personnel Archive, NZDF)
- <sup>35</sup> Telegrams: Blackett to Defender Wgtn. 22/5/1919. Defence Melbourne to Defender Wgtn. 23/5/1919. Blackett to Defender Wgtn. 24/5/1919. Defender Wgtn. to Blackett, 26/5/1919. Defender Wgtn. to Defence Melbourne, 26/5/1919. AD 1 59/156/3 (NA)
- <sup>36</sup> Defence Melbourne to Defence Wgtn., 23/5/1919. AD 1 59/156/3 (NA)
- <sup>37</sup> Navy Office, Melbourne, to Senior Naval Officer, New Zealand, Cable 29/5/1919. AD 1 59/156/3 (NA)
- <sup>38</sup> Conduct Sheet and Casualty Form. No. 16/8, Kainga, Pte. T. (Personnel Archive, NZDF)
- <sup>39</sup> Liverpool to Secretary of State for the Colonies, telegram, 20/5/1919. AD 1 59/156/3 (NA)
- <sup>40</sup> Various correspondence between Louisa Berman and the British and New Zealand Governments dated between 19/8/1919 and 5/11/1919. AAAB 482/32I Bermann, T. Maud Schwachtnberg, wife of Otto, found herself in the same position. AAAB 482/69c Schwachtnberg, O. (NA)
- <sup>41</sup> Lieut. E.J. Braining, Auckland Military District, to H.Q. Wellington, 17/1/1919. AD 1 59/156 (NA)



(Above) A group of internees from Featherston, including a *Seeadler* crew member, prepare to board the *SS Willochra* on 14 May 1919. (Photo: *Auckland Weekly News*, 22/5/1919, p. 34)

(Below) The transport *SS Willochra* leaving Southport, England, in early 1919 laden with New Zealand troops. Having recently played a key role bringing former British prisoners of war from Germany, the ship was en route for New Zealand where it collected New Zealand's prisoners of war who were bound for Germany. (Photo: *Auckland Weekly News*, 21/8/1919, p. 34)



## XVI

**Those who Remained**

Having been categorised as acceptable to remain in New Zealand, one would think that those left at Featherston would have soon regained their freedom. With one exception, this was not the case. Despite the fact that a number had families around the country who were struggling to survive, while all had lives to re-establish, the Government determinedly stood by the view that they must remain interned until ratification of the Treaty of Versailles formally ended the war<sup>1</sup>. Signed on 28 June 1919, the treaty took effect on 10 January 1920.

The internees, however, did not consider this sufficient reason for their continued ordeal and their increasing frustration showed up in a variety of ways. For example, in February 1919, Eberhard Focke wrote to Sir James Allen asking why men due for repatriation could gain parole. He said that if the authorities trusted those men with their freedom, then surely men with homes and families in New Zealand, and a desire to remain in the country, would present far less danger<sup>2</sup>. His request fell on deaf ears.

One internee, clearly a character, chose to ignore officialdom. Joseph David Holder claimed to be the Swiss-born son of Russian immigrants, and this possible nationality complicated life for his captors. After initially requesting repatriation, on 1 May he changed his mind and - unlike true Germans who had no such choice - succeeded in being withdrawn from the passenger list. Holder reasoned that he left home ten years earlier aged fifteen, to "make good", and he did not wish to return "home like a runaway nigger in the days of slavery, without a bean to his name." He also informed Brunt in his invariably picturesque style:

The old world (Europe) has made me feel small and humble indeed. I appear to myself sometimes smaller than a beetle. I wish to remain in New Zealand that long till I feel larger than the above named insect<sup>3</sup>.

In the early evening of 22 May, Holder mimicked another beetle trait. He later wrote that: "One day, it was at the end of May I believe, the monotony of camp-life got on my nerves and drew me clean through the barb-wire." In fact, he filed his way through the

barbed wire beside the steps to Hut No. 143 (the bulk of which extended outside the main secure compound) and crawled under the hut. He then crawled under one of the two adjoining huts and disappeared. Still, Holder did take the generous step of leaving Brunt a note:

You are notified hereby that I have granted myself a few days parole. I am merely trying to take a walk; to exchange monotony for action. There is a probability of my coming back so please do not order your men to confiscate my blankets, kitbag etc. I shall be much obliged to you, if you will grant me my last named wish. Yours respectfully, David Joseph Holder [sic]<sup>4</sup>.

Holder's cheek served him well. He spent the next four months casually wandering around Hawkes Bay and Gisborne (his pre-internment haunts), with the police taking an occasional interest in men who resembled him. Having come to the conclusion "that no-one was going to worry his head about my being at large," and after reading of the pending release of the Yugoslavs, he visited the Hastings Police. He sought the return of his possessions, especially his alien registration card. Arrested on 24 October, he soon found himself back at Featherston. There, he no doubt explained to his fellow internees that he had intended to "devise a means to free (them) as well. However due to lack of funds, I never endeavoured to carry out the second part of my program"<sup>5</sup>.

As a result of Holder's escape, camp authorities altered sentry procedures and confined the internees to their huts at 5:30 pm each day instead of 9:30 pm. Once again the Court learned that the internees were well aware that night-time sentries carried Snider Carbines loaded with buckshot instead of ball ammunition. In addition, after two escapes in barely a month attributed to such things, all tools associated with handcrafts were confiscated<sup>6</sup>.

Charles Nicholls-Brogie, a son-in-law of H.H. Beetham of Wairarapa and the only internee traced who communicated with the authorities through his lawyer, objected strongly, in June 1919, to remaining in camp. Clearly well-to-do, Nicholls-Brogie's transfer from Narrow Neck - where he was evidently treated as a first class prisoner - to Featherston, coincided with Karl Joosten's transfer to Narrow Neck. Naturally he objected to his reduced status (he originally came from Somes) and to some of those around him. He also strongly objected to being denied parole to attend his own business

interests while others apparently gained it “for reasons which are absolutely trivial in comparison with the business I have to arrange.” At that time three others from the camp were (officially) on parole<sup>7</sup>.

A considerable amount of agitation by the “Russians” also occurred in July 1919. On 3 July, Paul Nester asked why he remained when his internment was for the duration of the war. He still sought repatriation and asked why he did not go with the rest. He soon learned that the Army Act permitted the authorities to hold him under military custody until he was finally “disposed of”<sup>8</sup>. On 13 July, Olaf Halinen wrote to the Minister of Defence asking why he remained a prisoner despite the proclamation of peace. He demanded his immediate release or repatriation<sup>9</sup>. Then on 15 July, Arthur Muravleff and Halinen prepared a cable to be sent to Moscow’s Foreign Minister, stating: “Held prisoners no cause arrange release.” It was not sent<sup>10</sup>.

On 16 August, Muravleff demanded his release and repatriation to Russia. He complained that, unlike the Germans, he had not been permitted to write to his parents since his internment in December 1917 (other material in his file suggests the letters were sent but not replied to). He also wished to know the reason for his withdrawal from the May repatriation, why he was classified as a dangerous alien and why no trial had occurred<sup>11</sup>. On 18 July Brigadier General Richardson issued instructions to have Halinen informed that he was no longer a prisoner of war but rather remained in military custody pending final disposal<sup>12</sup>. The remaining “Russian”, Jan Jakobsen, evidently restricted his expressions of displeasure to creating a disturbance in Squadroom 4 on 14 July, for which he was admonished. The following month he received 18 days on No. 2 diet plus repair costs for breaking a shovel, and for insolence to the unpleasant Corporal Craig<sup>13</sup>.

No doubt adding to the frustrations of the “Russians” was the discovery “that our comrades Jugoslavs are about to be granted their liberty.” Halinen, Muravleff and the two Poles, Stanislaw Kazmierski and Josef Skrzypezak wrote on 24 August that it would be a:

Nerve-wracking and strenuous time for us after our comrades are gone as the inmates of this Camp are always hostile to us and it is very hard for the few to be among such lot.

As alternatives they offered to become the camp's cooks (suggesting that perhaps this job provided some isolation from the other internees, if not from angry, gun-carrying guards). They also sought a transfer from Squads 3-6, to Squad 2, "as we do not wish to associate with the Germans<sup>14</sup>."

The release of the ten Yugoslavs occurred on 18 September. The following day Peter Sulenta wrote to the Prime Minister on their behalf, in support of the two Poles. Sulenta was known to the wider Yugoslav community as the "King", for his great influence amongst them<sup>15</sup>. He said that the Poles supported the British during the war as the result was also freedom for Poland:

When we left yesterday they were both crying like a children because they remain with about 70 Huns and they expect all the unkindness to receive from their hands.

He added that if freed he could arrange jobs and financial assistance for them in Auckland. In response, on 30 September Brigadier General Richardson recommended that the Minister of Defence approve the pair's release. Accordingly, on 10 October they received an unconditional release and warrants to get them to Auckland<sup>16</sup>.

During the second half of 1919 a small trickle of internees received parole<sup>17</sup>, and a report dated 22 September recording the departure of the Yugoslavs, states that 79 internees remained. These included 72 in camp, one in Porirua Mental Hospital, five on parole and one (Holder) at large<sup>18</sup>. Concern for an internee's health, or his long-suffering wife's health or poverty was the main reason for parole. Charles Nicholls-Brogie, who went through a car windscreen in 1911, needed specialist medical help. His release on parole to permit this treatment, came in July 1919. It became unconditional, along with seven others (including the two Poles) in October<sup>19</sup>. Carl Mumme, a "revolutionary socialist" and former Somes agitator, received temporary paroles in March, July and September 1919, received as unconditional release at this time due to his New Zealand-born wife's ongoing ill-health<sup>20</sup>.

Guards also departed including Sergeant Reginald Laine, who had served in the Internment Camp Guard since 28 August 1914. He left on 29 October 1919. Laine, a former commercial traveller, had a heart weakness that prevented him from serving

overseas. Despite a checkered relationship with the internees such as running the camp canteen for his own profit, on the whole the internee files suggest his presence was not antagonistic. For example, in 1917 he helped an internee send a photo of the internee and part of the camp to his relatives in Europe, by explaining the situation to the Censor. Laine concluded his note with the comment: "May I mention that I took the photograph myself"<sup>21</sup>.

New Zealand rushed into repatriating prisoners of war, confident that eventually it would receive payment from the German Government for the task<sup>22</sup>. The account for the voyage, payable to Shaw Savill & Albion Co. Ltd., came to £13,015/6/6<sup>23</sup>. Britain had not considered who was to bear the eventual cost when repatriating its internees and Viscount Milner, Secretary of State for the Colonies, recommended New Zealand follow suit<sup>24</sup>.

On 27 August 1919, the Principal Allied Associated Powers informed Germany they were to commence repatriation of German military prisoners of war. Prior to this only medical staff, incapacitated combatants and interned civilians were to be returned. In November Milner contacted New Zealand's Governor General asking for a list of those repatriated and those deported. He also sought the names of those who were destitute and those who, while not destitute, could not afford their fares. His new proposal was that repatriates pay their own fares, subject to any refund attainable from Germany. Milner thought it unlikely that any money would be extracted from Germany in the near future, due to Article 248 of the Peace Treaty. This Article required that the "first charge upon the assets and revenues of the German Empire and its constituent States," would be the cost of reparations for damage incurred by the Allies during the war<sup>25</sup>. In November 1920, Milner repeated his view that possibly nothing would be recovered from Germany, but reminded that at least early repatriation saved maintaining the internees<sup>26</sup>.

On 17 November, the first "Russian", the Finnish-born Jan Jakabsen (also called Ernst Lind) vanished from the camp prior to the 6:00 pm Roll Call. This act provided the grounds to deport him, however, he eluded his would-be captors<sup>27</sup>. Interestingly, his close friend, 59-year-old Frederick Radloff, received parole the same day. Radloff, a

naturalised Australian, worked for the Wellington City Council for several months to earn his fare to Australia. Being a citizen of Australia, its authorities accepted him back automatically<sup>28</sup>.

Although the Treaty of Versailles had yet to take effect, the New Zealand Government elected to free most internees in December 1919. With the impending return of a large amount of military equipment, the Defence Department chose to use Featherston, and part of Trentham Military Camp, for storage purposes<sup>29</sup>. As a result, on 6 December, Brigadier General Richardson ordered the official release of 53 internees, 23 of whom (including the two Poles) were already on parole. Those released from camp simply had to report to the police when they reached home to see what provisions of the Aliens' Act affected them. Another eleven, including the Joosten brothers and some already on parole, were to receive formal paroles. Seven more, including two bound for Australia (including Radloff who was already on parole) and the three remaining Russians (plus Jakobsen when found) were theoretically to remain interned awaiting repatriation. Another six awaited deportation. A significant reduction in the Guard was also planned<sup>30</sup>.

As a result, on 9 December, twenty men, including former escapee Holder, were released from Featherston Internment Camp and given travelling warrants to their respective destinations. Most chose Auckland or Wellington. Five more received parole with travelling warrants, after signing a certificate relating to provisions of the Aliens Act<sup>31</sup>.

Overlooked, though, were Henry Gönning and Theodor Bunz, the men who became ill on the *Willochra*. Gönning wished to remain in New Zealand and after inquiries as to his fate on 8 December, he gained parole on 11 December<sup>32</sup>. Bunz, who made the mistake of preferring repatriation, stayed interned.

As so few internees were left, these men faced even greater frustration. Bunz quickly regretted his decision and in late January asked the commandant why he remained interned despite the peace treaty's ratification. Why should he not have the same privileges as men who caused the camp authorities so much trouble. Those men, whether in Europe or New Zealand, were now free, he complained. He learned that the

Government still intended returning him to Germany and that he must stay interned until embarkation<sup>33</sup>.

On 24 February 1920, Rinaldo, the "Austrian", turned Czechoslovakian showman (and therefore an Allied subject), found himself unconditionally free to return to the entertainment circuit. Permission by Australia for him to return to his family in Adelaide finally came through in mid-April, by which time he (and presumably his dogs) was touring New Zealand with the Fuller entertainment company<sup>34</sup>.

By late February 1920, only six internees, including Bunz, Nicholas Petersen, Wilhelm Latterman and the last three "Russians" remained at Featherston. Another eight remained at Narrow Neck. As a result of a Cabinet decision on 9 January, most of these men, including Jakabsen when recaptured, awaited deportation. Bunz and three Narrow Neck internees, however, were still classified as repatriates<sup>35</sup>. Although due to leave Lyttelton on the *Matatua* in March<sup>36</sup>, new problems surfaced as the departure date drew near. While during wartime the Defence Department could "do as they pleased", with Peace came the need, under the Undesirable Immigrants Act, for the Attorney-General to be:

Satisfied that a person is disaffected or disloyal or likely to be a source of danger to peace, order and good government on N.Z.

The Act did not contemplate deportation because someone was an enemy alien and, except for the escapee Jakabsen, the Attorney-General would not sign a deportation warrant based on the information available on these men. Further complicating the issue, numbers of internees intended for the *Matatua* were required the following morning (6 March), the ship being due to leave on 17 March. The Attorney-General suggested, therefore, abandoning the proposal to use that ship<sup>37</sup>.

In the early hours of 17 March, the day they should have sailed on the *Matatua*, three internees (the "Russians", Muravloff and Halinen, and the German, Nicholas Petersen) broke through the floor of their "cell" and vanished. Soldiers spent three days searching before leaving the matter to the Police. Muravloff reappeared in July to retrieve his property from the camp, however, the Government no longer had the will to arrest either him or his companions<sup>38</sup>.

The gradual winding down of Featherston Internment Camp, by planned and “unplanned” means, continued with the demobilisation of Major Brunt. Although his records are unclear on the matter, at the end he was Commandant of the whole Military Camp. Administrative complications delayed the down-sizing of the military camp. As a result it was not until 9 April 1920 that Brunt finally handed the last four internees to his replacement, former Assistant Commandant Captain R. Irvine<sup>39</sup>.

Finally, on 27 April 1920, Irvine wrote that in response to instructions from Headquarters (dated 22 April), the last four internees, Gorg Ernst Engelbrecht, Paul Nester, Theodor Bunz and Wilhelm Lattemann, had been released. Bunz, who was destitute, received £2, and apparently a repayment slip, with which to re-establish his life. Irvine concluded his report: “As instructed by you, the Internment Camp has been closed and the staff demobilised”<sup>40</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> NZPD, Vol. 184, 1919, p. 600

<sup>2</sup> E. Focke to Sir James Allen, undated, but accompanying letter dated 14/2/1919. AAAB 482 60q 603, Bornhold, A.M.A. (NA)

<sup>3</sup> J.D. Holder to Major Brunt, 1/5/1919. AAAB 482/16d Holder, J.D. (NA)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 22/5/1919, 23/9/1919. AAAB 482/16d (NA)

<sup>5</sup> J.D. Holder to Minister of Defence, 23/9/1919. AAAB 482/16d (NA)

<sup>6</sup> Report of Court of Enquiry, 24/5/1919. AAAB 482/16d (NA)

<sup>7</sup> C. Nicholls-Brogie to Hon. T.M. Wilford, 30/6/1919. AAAB 482/22a, Nicholls-Brogie, C. (NA)

<sup>8</sup> P. Nester to ‘Sir’, 3/7/1919. Brig.-Gen. G.S. Richardson to Commandant, Featherston, 14/7/1919. AAAB 482/25d, Nester, P. (NA)

<sup>9</sup> O. Halinen to Minister of Defence, 13/7/1919. AAAB 482/65a, Halinen, O. (NA)

<sup>10</sup> Proposed cable, A. Muravleff and O. Halinen to Foreign Minister, Moscow, 15/7/1919. Brig. Gen. G.S. Richardson to Camp Commandant, Featherston, 22/7/1919. AAAB 482/67e, Muravleff, A. (NA)

<sup>11</sup> A. Muravleff to Sir James Allen, 16/8/1919. AAAB 482/67e (NA)

<sup>12</sup> Brig. Gen. G.S. Richardson to Camp Commandant, Featherston, 18/7/1919. AAAB 482/65a (NA)

<sup>13</sup> Extract from the Weekly Report on POWs, Featherston, 19/7/1919, 26/8/1919. AAAB 482/65f

Jakabsen, J. (NA)

<sup>14</sup> O. Halinen and others, to “Sir”, 24/8/1919. AAAB 482/37d, Skrzypezak, J. (NA)

<sup>15</sup> Brig-Gen. G.S. Richardson to Minister of Defence, 23/8/1919. AAAB 482/35a (NA)

<sup>16</sup> P.M. Sulenta to Rt. Hon. W.F. Massey, 19/9/1919. Brig. Gen. G.S. Richardson to Minister of Defence, 30/9/1919. AAAB 482/37d (NA)

<sup>17</sup> e.g. See Major Brunt to General Officer i/c Administration, 29/9/1919. AAAB 482/24o, Mumme, C. (NA)

<sup>18</sup> Major Brunt to Assistant Adjutant-General, 22/9/1919. AAAB 482/24o (NA)

<sup>19</sup> AAAB 482/22a (NA). Lieut. Col. C.E. Andrews to POWIB, London, 25/10/1919, AAAB 482/37d (NA)

<sup>20</sup> AAAB 482/24o (NA)

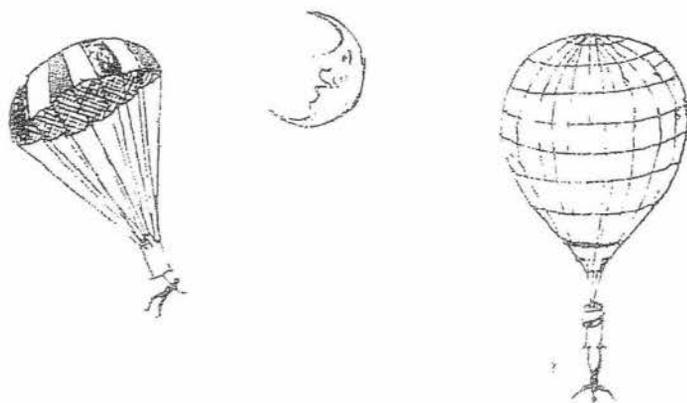
<sup>21</sup> Sgt. Laine to Mr Tanner, 17/7/1917. AAAB 482/69h Mersey, R. (NA)

<sup>22</sup> Article 217, Treaty of Peace (Treaty of Versailles). *British and Foreign State Papers*, 1919, Vol. 112. p. 101.

<sup>23</sup> Shaw Savill & Albion Co. Ltd., 17/6/1919. AD 1 59/156/3 POW Repatriation(NA)

<sup>24</sup> Lieut. Col. R. (illegible) to G.O.C., 14/8/1919. AD 1 59/156/3 (NA)

- <sup>25</sup> Viscount Milner to Governor General, N.Z., 27/11/1919. AD 1 59/156/3 (NA). Also Fred L. Israel (ed.), *Major Peace Treaties of Modern History 1648-1967* (New York, 1967). p. 1420.
- <sup>26</sup> Milner to Governor General, N.Z., 12/11/1920. AD 1 59/156/3 (NA)
- <sup>27</sup> Major Brunt to General Officer i/c Administration, 17/11/1919. AAAB 482/65f (NA)
- <sup>28</sup> A.N. Shepherd, Secretary, Prime Minister's Dept., Commonwealth of Australia, to F. Radloff, 3/11/1919. Report of Constable A. McLeod, Featherston, 24/11/1919. AAAB 482/48c Radloff, F. (NA)
- <sup>29</sup> EP 11/12/1919 3(4)
- <sup>30</sup> Brig. Gen. G.S. Richardson to Officer Commanding POW Camp, Featherston, 6/12/1919. 11/12/1919, Major Brunt to General Officer i/c Administration, 11/12/1919. AAAB 482/60q 603 (NA)
- <sup>31</sup> Major Brunt to General Officer, i/c Administration, 9/12/1919. AAAB 482/16d (NA)
- <sup>32</sup> Lieut. A.J. Ridler to O.C. Featherston Internment Camp, 8/12/1919. Major Brunt to General Officer i/c Administration, 11/12/1919. AAAB 482/13d, Gönning, H.A. (NA)
- <sup>33</sup> T. Bunz to Major Brunt, 22/1/1920, 19/2/1920, 25/2/1920. Lieut. G.J. Ridler to T. Bunz, 27/1/1920. AAAB 482/57d (NA)
- <sup>34</sup> Weekly Report of POW Internment Camp, 28/2/1920. Brig. Gen. G.S. Richardson to Under-Secretary of Dept. of Internal Affairs, 13/4/1920. Also material relating to his acceptance as a Czechoslovakian subject. AAAB 482/36g Rinaldo, Z. (NA)
- <sup>35</sup> Memorandum for the Secretary of External Affairs, 27/2/1920. AAAB 482/57d Bunz, Theodor (NA)
- <sup>36</sup> T. Bunz to "Sir", 19/2/1920. A.J. Ridler to Camp Commandant, 25/2/1920. AAAB 482/57d (NA)
- <sup>37</sup> External Affairs, Wgtn., to J.D. Gray (aboard) *S.S. Mokoia*, 5/3/1920. AAAB 482/65f (NA)
- <sup>38</sup> *New Zealand Times* clipping dated 19/3/1920. Also Lieut. Col. C.E. Andrews to Acting Secretary, External Affairs Dept., 27/3/1920. A.J. Harding to S.O. 'Q' Duties, 20/7/1920. AAAB 482/67f Muravleff, A.I. and file AD 1 59/174 Escape POW, from Featherston Camp, 18/3/1920 (NA)
- <sup>39</sup> Lieut. Col. C.E. Andrews to Major Brunt, 20/2/1920. Major Brunt to Headquarters ('A' Duties), NZMF, Wgtn., 20/3/1920. Extract from N.Z. Gazette, No. 44, 5/5/1920. No. 10/650, Brunt (Personnel Archive, NZDF)
- <sup>40</sup> Lieut. R. Irvine To Headquarters ('A' Branch), 27/4/1920. AAAB 482/57d (NA)



BALLOONING! BALLOONING!  
 IS'NT IT AWFULLY GRAND  
 WITH A WHOOP! HELLO!!  
 OFF WE GO FAR AWAY FROM LAND,  
 WINNING YOUR EYE AT VENUS,  
 TAKING A DRINK WITH MARS;  
 IS'NT IT JOLLY BALLOONING  
 UP AMONGST THE STARS.  
 A BALLOON! A GIRL!!  
 AND LIBERTY

XMAS 1915  
 RINALDO

A 1915 entry in Molly Smith's autograph book reveals entertainer Rinaldo's list of priorities. Despite his wish for liberty, he endured perhaps the longest internment of all, being detained between 22 August 1914 and 24 February 1920.

Molly's father, John Wagstaff, was the Agriculture Department's Quarantine Officer on Somes Island during the war. Wagstaff and the lighthouse keepers (the Harts) sometimes served as unwilling supply depots for goods required by internees. Wagstaff, who considered some internees to be "terrible thieves", lost the chains and springs from two "bull sticks" to Walter Krausch and his mate in 1917. When Matheson later asked why Wagstaff had said he would not report the matter if the items were returned, Wagstaff replied: "I wanted the articles back and I thought I would not get them if they thought I would report." The items were immediately returned. Needless to say, Krausch's pre-war character was not flawless. (Photo: Molly Smith, Dargaville. This copy made available by the Department of Conservation, Wellington Conservancy. Also AAAB 482/39c, Krausch, W, [NA] )

## Conclusion

In October 1916, the *Evening Post* published an article on German prisoners of war held in English camps, and the manner in which the neutral American Government supervised their care. This report, unless removed by *Somes'* censor, would also have been read by the internees. In contrasting civilian internees with captured soldiers, it stated:

There is a great difference between the civilian and military prisoners. The civilians are Germans of military age who were resident in England at the outbreak of the war, and they have been put into internment camps to keep them out of harm's way and as a precautionary measure against espionage. They are not happy; their compulsory detention is irksome, and most of the complaints come from them. With regard to the military it is totally different. These prisoners are under the supervision and control of non-commissioned German officers, the discipline is as strict as if the men were still in the field. Perfect order is kept and the soldiers make little trouble and virtually no complaints<sup>1</sup>.

The article described how American inspectors visited the camps (containing some 60,000 men) at their leisure, thus denying camp authorities any chance to ensure things looked good when they arrived. The War Office then quickly fixed any problems. The Americans also administered a fund supplied by Germany to provide destitute prisoners with luxuries such as tobacco and chocolate. In addition, at that time anyway, prisoners faced no danger of incurring the displeasure of camp authorities by making complaints to the American Embassy, as their letters to that destination were not censored. Administration committees of prisoners, called "Lowry Committees", dealt with welfare matters and carried a "good deal of authority." There were also committees for sport, music and theatrics, as well as a YMCA band. The report added, however, that the considerable degree of self-government worked better in military camps than in civilian camps.

Germany's Ruhleben Internment Camp for British civilians, while short of food and regularly criticised in newspapers in British countries, also developed extensive internal organisations. This included self-government and pastimes sponsored by the YMCA<sup>2</sup>. In contrast, in late 1917, it was *Somes'* "somewhat overlooked" guards who received the YMCA's attention. They gained a gramophone and records, games, writing paper and envelopes, as well as having their billiard table renewed and provided with accessories<sup>3</sup>. A few fortunate internees received wages to erect the YMCA building.

Key features that distinguish *Somes* from camps like Ruhleben, Holdsworthy (Australia), and the generalised descriptions available of British civilian internment camps, include its small size and the level of direct control imposed by captors upon prisoners. Had the camp been

significantly larger, the authorities would probably have felt compelled to adapt their administration practices to a style that placed higher expectations on the administrative abilities of the inmates. Similarly, had the over-zealous Matheson permitted the establishment of viable camp committees and also allowed them the freedom to establish similar degrees of self-government, things would almost certainly have been different. The internees themselves felt disadvantaged in relation to overseas internment camps. They learned this from their daily newspapers.

It is impossible not to see incompetence, albeit heavily influenced by ethnic tensions, behind the problems on Somes. Officials and organisations that should have supervised the camp and assisted the internees clearly failed to do so. Of course, an Auckland-based consul could not easily arrive unannounced on a military-run island in Wellington Harbour. Logically, inspection visits would be known hours, if not days, in advance. Archival evidence supports this<sup>4</sup>.

Matheson clearly orchestrated the visits of American Consul Generals Brittain and Winslow. Anticipation of Brittain's visit in March 1915 caused potentially disruptive internees (in Matheson's opinion) to be locked away until he left. Winslow visited in August 1915, and instead of personally recording details himself, he requested a report on activities on the island that was, in fact, prepared by Major Matheson. Matheson was unlikely to criticise himself. Winslow's next visit, in April 1916, seemingly found a contented holiday resort.

Around the same time, the *Auckland Weekly News*'s readers, used to daily newspaper reports of wartime brutality and carnage, saw cheerful photos of happy "enemy aliens" enjoying the good life. New Zealand obviously treated its prisoners well. Too well, many thought. Even the censor mentioned destroying "numerous letters" containing "covert or indirect complaints," because he knew "these fellows (had) no grounds for complaint." He considered they merely sought to "excite sympathy and pity" from their "Home folk"<sup>5</sup>. British people who took an interest in 1916 heard a similar story:

The New Zealand Germans were interned in shark-infested Wellington Harbour, where they could do what they liked without troubling anyone<sup>6</sup>.

In short, life as interned "enemy aliens" in New Zealand was great, because everyone who was not interned said so.

The internees' "truth" appeared in November 1916, during Winslow's third visit, and the fourth by an American representative. Just as he did not wish to speak to many internees, Winslow also chose not to forward their written complaints to Germany. He accepted the word of Matheson,

who, in the meantime, had actively worked to undermine the complainants' credibility. America then entered the war and the internees found themselves forced to start over again. While the American Consul Generals appear to have been United States citizens, the Swiss Consuls and Acting Consuls appear to have been New Zealanders. Australia's Swiss Consul General was a Swiss national, but took little or no interest in New Zealand.

The first Swiss Consul (seemingly W.J. Pugh, but perhaps Sidney Nathan) visited in July 1917. Despite the internees requesting reasonable prior notice to enable them to write their grievances, they learned of his visit with perhaps only minutes to spare. This tactic gave the camp's controllers adequate time to prepare themselves, but seriously limited the internees' access to the person charged with their protection. Pugh generally seems to have performed his duties well. Certainly he was instrumental in forcing the New Zealand Government to conduct the Royal Commission. However, Matheson still appears to have attempted to use Pugh's visit in January 1918 to create a stage-managed display of gratitude by some more fortunate impoverished German internees. Paul Arnold expressed surprise that Matheson personally handed out the German Government's money.

Pugh eventually succumbed to the myth surrounding the camp, with Karl Joosten transformed into the scapegoat. The same tactic eventually seemed to work on Count von Luckner as well. None of the consuls who followed appear to have visited either Somes or Featherston. Indeed, evidence suggests that Pugh's January 1918 visit was the last, despite men remaining interned until April 1920. Lothar Eilender's firm reminder to one consul that the internees were dependent on him, merely promoted the authorities' cause by antagonising Major Brunt.

While it seems unusual that procedures supposedly used by America in Britain's internment camps were not utilised in New Zealand, one might question why also was money supplied by the German Government for prisoners of war not requested earlier for these men. The American Consul Generals, and in particular Winslow, knew most were destitute and that no realistic paid work was available to them. Why did they not question the extent of the unpaid work expected of these men? Was it simply that New Zealand, so far from the British decision-makers, simply did not take the time to consider its obligations under the Hague Convention? Possibly the happy holiday camp facade and the failure of aggrieved men to risk speaking out (or to have the opportunity to speak out) meant that once again their captors spoke for them.

Locating "the truth" in the complicated relationship between Matheson and his charges is fraught with difficulty. The public, if newspaper reports and the memoirs of Assistant Commandant

Rogers were correct, were fairly interested in the well-being of the internees in the beginning. Meanwhile, according to Rogers, Matheson was still the eternal school teacher. The original guards probably included some of his former pupils, while perhaps initially he perceived his latest intake of “pupils” merely to be a little older than usual and perhaps just a little more unruly. We do not know why the authorities selected Matheson for this duty, although ill-health influenced his leaving teaching in 1913<sup>7</sup>. As a 46-year-old major in August 1914, he would otherwise have seemed suitable for NZEF service. His work as officer commanding school cadets at Wellington College and perhaps his years at Stanway School near a German settlement, may also have influenced the choice. What appears unlikely to have been adequately considered, though, was his psychological ability to cope with the job.

Matheson’s superiors appear to have failed to provide him with adequate support and this factor certainly exacerbated problems. The fact that both Matheson and Osburne-Lilly, his immediate superior officer, were former school teachers doubtless influenced their own attitudes. Osburne-Lilly’s teaching career was not successful. He supposedly neglected his duties at Tiritea School and made up for his imperfections by burdening his young pupils with too many duties and too much homework. Perhaps it is these same traits (expecting too much of those he commanded) that impacted so heavily on Some. While Osburne-Lilly was not Matheson’s immediate superior officer for the entire period, his name, while fulfilling a similar role, appears in correspondence to Matheson, on behalf of the Adjutant General<sup>8</sup>.

Similarly, had Colonel Chaytor not been required to perform “one of the most skilful feats of organisation and administration in New Zealand’s military history” in August 1914 (that is, dispatching the Samoan occupation force and the NZEF Main Body)<sup>9</sup>, then perhaps the haphazard organisational and administrative groundwork for this other feat in New Zealand’s military history might not have been left to personality, guesswork and, consequently, illegal and sometimes inhumane acts.

The paper Matheson presented to the Teacher’s Institute in 1900<sup>10</sup> indicates the strength of his feelings for the cause of physical education in schools. It also suggests that his views were very sincere. However, Matheson took his personal enthusiasm for “healthful exercise” to the point where he forced his ideals onto relatively defenceless prisoners of war, and then permitted punishments, including severe beatings and food manipulation, if they did not co-operate. Worse still, he clearly participated in this violence himself and the internees certainly thought he enjoy the experience.

For all the complaints, even Chapman remarked that the seven hours each man “exercised” each week was, in his opinion, beneficial to them. A medical inspection found them a “sound, healthy body of men”<sup>11</sup>. He also considered that insistence upon “regular and cleanly habits, abstinence from intoxicants, and regular feeding has in many cases brought improved health.” In addition, he found that the “sombre picture so persistently presented to me was contradicted by the smiling faces and the healthful jovial air of the men themselves”<sup>12</sup>. Of course, the men considered gaining the Royal Commission of Inquiry a huge success, and would logically present a fairly self-satisfied front. Photos of internees involved in more orthodox forms of sport suggest they enjoyed those particular activities. Photos also exist of them performing the forced unpaid work. It seems improbable, however, that anyone would elect to photograph a beating.

In the spirit of tit-for-tat retributions operating between Britain and Germany, Matheson’s relatively well-meaning approach to healthful exercise might easily have caused repercussions to New Zealanders in German hands, had the German authorities known. Doubtless awareness of this was behind apparent acts of concealment that occurred, including the delay in releasing the Royal Commission Report until late 1919.

Chapman thought Matheson was too isolated in his duties and had too much responsibility. Clearly embittered by anti-Germanism, perhaps he felt frustrated at his inability to fulfill the military role he spent decades training for. Certainly he found himself in a situation to which he was unsuited. Many internee statements paint Matheson as a virtual sadist in the manner in which he expressed his anger. The internees suggested that he drank and that possibly his mind was disturbed. Probably his duties on the island created these problems, or at least their apparent symptoms. Given repeated supportive comments by his superiors, perhaps outside the considerable pressures of his “commandant” role his disposition was more genial. Certainly he returned to teaching after the war<sup>13</sup>, a profession that would not condone the level of physical punishment Matheson and his men allegedly resorted to on Somes. It must, however, be remembered that Matheson spent years dealing with regular visits from formidable Education Board Inspectors. He would not, therefore, be unaccustomed to the need to present a good front.

As a topic for study, the many twists and turns involved in the Somes story, combined with the clear impact of military secrecy, propaganda and World War One-style ethnocentricity, mean that its sequences of events were unpredictable. The potential for newspaper sources to be influenced by propaganda and, of course, human error, also enter the equation. In addition - and most importantly - it must always be acknowledged that the surviving records are those created by the dominant social group on the island. The sub-group’s words are “court transcripts” (where

Matheson was hardly likely to incriminate himself), and confiscated letters and statements. These outline ill-treatment that the internees' "masters" actively sought to deny. Doubtless many more important details remain hidden in other files on the camp, its staff and its inmates. No doubt many details are now lost, due to the repatriation of internees and the passing of time.

While the authorities chose to blame Karl Joosten for disrupting their perception of tranquillity on *Somes*, clearly a great deal of protest occurred before his internment. In fact, he arrived during a near mutiny that he certainly did not create. Camp spokesmen prior to Joosten, included Edmund Diehl and Fritz Schumacher. Others, such as Carl Mumme, operated discreetly in the background, while Robert Hall lost favour when he became a little too friendly with Matheson. Others with status and influence included Wellington's former German Consul, the elderly Eberhard Focke. Joosten, though, became the medium through which the 1918 protest movement operated. Because of this, the guards sought to undermine him in the eyes of the internees. In the end, possibly he judged Major Brunt too harshly, perhaps assuming he would respond to problems in a manner similar to Matheson. Brunt, of course, was certainly influenced by the views of his predecessor.

Matheson forced his long-standing enthusiasm for exercise onto the internees to the extent that, because of his methods, New Zealand spent years breaking international law. What he viewed as healthful exercise, was, whether or not he ever acknowledged it, instead forcibly obtained unpaid labour. A blunter term for the same type of activity - especially given the four-year time frame - is slave labour. What he viewed as healthy exposure to the fresh air, a trend promoted by health experts around that time, the internees viewed as lengthy banishment from their quarters in all but the worst weather.

Matheson's enthusiasm for military training also places his performance at risk of criticism. His goal in 1900 was in part to see young men physically able to defend their country. As photos attest, he even permitted his charges on *Somes* to make German military uniforms and wooden guns, something that could seem unusual in the circumstances. Still, once again New Zealand's lax interpretation of the Hague Convention sees the camp fail to be above reproach. Prisoners of war were not to contribute toward matters relating to military operations, and certainly the internees' considered that they should not have built a rifle range for the guards. Matheson also received regular intakes of NZEF recruits, who guarded the internees in the course of their training for overseas service. In this aspect too, therefore, New Zealand broke international law. Furthermore, seemingly dozens, if not hundreds, of recruits gained their first chance to

participate in a “Front Line” battle, at the expense of disempowered “enemy aliens” on Somes Island.

As Chapman pointed out, the guards took their lead from their strong-minded commanding officer and at times he certainly overstepped the mark. Consequently some guards particularly enjoyed the resulting “freedom of expression.” While it is difficult to see “Matheson the brute” in the highly regarded officer readily protected by his superiors, there is too much archival evidence to the contrary to ignore. From an internee’s point of view, life on Somes Island involved years of forced, unpaid labour and a considerable amount of military-style discipline and punishment. Their commandant, a “Victorian-style” school teacher, was particularly strict and perhaps rather too short tempered. Add also strong ethnic tensions often based on propaganda, and an unsupervised leader with a passion for preserving the health and fitness of others. Then give to one side an assortment of guns, weaponry and power, and to the other side only a collection of volatile, disempowered mostly young men. Small wonder, perhaps, that in post-war times, many people preferred to forget the first “enemy alien” internment camp on Somes Island.

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<sup>1</sup> EP 23/10/1916 2(6-7)

<sup>2</sup> Ketchum, chapters 10-16

<sup>3</sup> EP 28/8/1917 6(7)

<sup>4</sup> e.g. Requests to the Commander of N.Z. Forces and Sir James Allen, by American Consul Generals’ Brittain and Winslow, to visit Somes in March and August 1915, respectively. AD 1 59/62. German and Austrian Subjects in New Zealand, re. control of interests during the war by the American Consular Agency. (NA)

<sup>5</sup> Translated extract from a letter by August Oemcke to his wife Anna in Bavaria, 4/10/1915, endorsed by N.Z. Censor. AAAB 482/70g, Oemcke, A. (NA)

<sup>6</sup> Times Printing House, *Times History of the War* (London, 1916), Vol. 6. p. 124

<sup>7</sup> Lauridsen. p. 43

<sup>8</sup> Reference is to Major J. Osburne-Lilly to Major Matheson, on behalf of Adjutant General, 7/2/1917. AD 1 42/66, Visitors to POW Camps (NA)

<sup>9</sup> Wicksteed. p. 94

<sup>10</sup> FS 13/12/1900 2(8)

<sup>11</sup> *AJHR* 1919, H-33. p. 20

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p. 23

<sup>13</sup> Lauridsen. p. 43

## Post Script: Loose Ends

As predicted by the authorities, Karl Joosten did not enjoy a privileged position at Narrow Neck. Later he angrily complained that during his whole internment he was kept by special orders amongst sailors, firemen and wharf labourers. At Motuihi, provision "existed ... for 1st (class) POWs (and this was) where junior officials of the Samoan Government and assistants of South Sea Island trading houses" and other Honorary Consuls were held. Joosten, however, was denied that right. Instead:

Special instructions accompanied me, forbidding that I be given the "consideration" of being housed with my social equals, and my various appeals against such "special persecution" were declined on the ground that "competent authority" did not consider me entitled to better treatment<sup>1</sup>.

Possibly Joosten's star waned somewhat at Featherston prior to his transfer. Alfred Kraut wrote to Albert Lossau at Narrow Neck in March 1919, of an unnamed person they both knew: "I am not so much astonished as you imagine about that man as quite a lot of us did not speak to him for months past"<sup>2</sup>. A typed copy of the letter on Kraut's file is accompanied by a cover note from Major Brunt. Brunt remarks: "In view of past events this letter was very interesting to me"<sup>3</sup>.

After months of dispute with the authorities, regarding fares, rights and privileges, Joosten, his German-born wife Margarete, and their five New Zealand-born children, sailed for Europe in September 1920. The New Zealand Government paid their fares, at saloon rates, and the family and another ex-internee's family in a similar position, ensured they got their money's worth. In addition, having been unable to "earn a penny" since war broke out, the destitute Joosten family spent its last weeks in New Zealand living at the military facility at Devonport. They were not, however, interned<sup>4</sup>.

Joosten, then based in Rotterdam, continued to fight for his rights and his former New Zealand naturalisation. He argued that only New Zealand cancelled the naturalisations of its citizens of enemy origin. On the other hand:

Britain, America, France, Belgium, Italy, Canada, (South) Africa, Australia - all have kept their pledge to the naturalised subjects of enemy country origin - only you failed!<sup>5</sup>.

F.H.D. Bell, Attorney General and Acting Prime Minister, replied somewhat sarcastically:

Perhaps you would better understand the position if you cared to ascertain what course Germany had taken in respect of British citizens who had become naturalised Germans and resided in Germany<sup>6</sup>.

Joosten's subsequent enquiries revealed that Germany had not denaturalised a "single naturalised Britisher (or any National for that matter)" and that these people had been allowed to continue their business unmolested. On the other hand German-born people holding British nationality had been interned as British subjects when war erupted<sup>7</sup>.

Joosten's battle to regain his New Zealand citizenship (he no longer qualified as a German citizen either) evidently ended in 1922 with a curt letter from Prime Minister Massey: "In reply, I beg to say the Government of New Zealand has nothing further to add to Sir Francis Bell's letter to you of the 8th August last"<sup>8</sup>.

Life was not easy for at least some former internees, repatriated or otherwise. The New Zealand public did not give up its resentment willingly. Max Bornhold, one of those released in December 1919, attempted to re-establish his jewellers' business in Mangaweka. However, a returned serviceman, assisted by the Rehabilitation Department, had also set up a jewellers' business there. As Bornhold's temporarily abandoned stock still had pre-war prices, the ex-soldier could not compete. Complaints by the Taihape Returned Soldiers' Association's both to the Auckland RSA and to the Minister of Internal Affairs, sought to have Bornhold deported<sup>9</sup>. While the Minister of Internal Affairs refused to do this, Bornhold's denaturalisation in 1918 and the fact that his wife and daughter spent the war stranded in Germany, influenced his decision to leave New Zealand in December 1920. He did not apparently return. Despite many small-town rumours, Bornhold's internment occurred after the censor caught him sending money to his unfortunate wife in Germany, via relatives in America<sup>10</sup>.

Even Robert Hall, who was ostracised in camp because of his "outspoken, fair-minded utterances," returned to Germany in 1920. He travelled at New Zealand's expense with a shipload of Australia's former internees.<sup>11</sup>

A few repatriates again made contact with New Zealand, including George Dibbern who found himself on *Somes* in World War Two<sup>12</sup>. In 1924 Luciano Lenaz visited the British Consulate in Fiume (now Rijeka, in former Yugoslavia), seeking wages for two years' unpaid labouring work on *Somes*. The only reward he had received for his work, he said, was a weekly packet of tobacco issued by Major Matheson. He claimed Matheson promised him 3/- per day for the work he did, but never paid him. As Lenaz was absolutely destitute and unable to earn a living due to "general debility," the consul attempted to assist, The New Zealand Government, however, denied responsibility<sup>13</sup>. The Australian authorities contacted New Zealand in 1926, seeking information on Paul Gebauer, who hoped to enter that country. A relatively good character reference resulted<sup>14</sup>. Ludwig Christmann, who boarded the *Willochra* directly from Featherston Military Camp's hospital, wrote to the New Zealand Government in 1927 seeking written proof of the origin of his lengthy illness. He had been unable to work since April 1919 and required a document to this effect from New Zealand to give to the German Government<sup>15</sup>.

Some internees, including Lenaz, pressed their case for payment before departure. Cornelius Lemke, an elderly, "feeble-minded" German seaman. Lemke worked for five months in 1917-18 on the launch *Rehu Tai* that operated between *Somes* and Wellington. He claimed Matheson promised him £5 for the five months' work, to be paid after the war. This was denied, yet again, in 1920, following Lemke's repatriation. Instead his work on the boat was described as "odd jobs of no consequence" that allowed him to "amuse himself," and were permitted as a matter of kindness<sup>16</sup>.

For all the threats to ensure that Germany's vengeance eventually rained down upon New Zealand, there is little evidence that the repatriated internees gained much of a hearing when they got home. In mid-1920, though, the German Government (through the Swiss Government) contacted Britain seeking letters of complaint supposedly written in New Zealand and Samoa. These were said to have been addressed to the German Government via the Swiss Consul in Auckland. In accordance with instructions

the consul had received, he had first submitted the letters to the New Zealand Government. The Government had then, for various reasons decided they should not be forwarded and had retained them. After explaining that it was now difficult to ascertain what correspondence was retained, it acknowledged stopping two letters from Samoan internees on Motuihi<sup>17</sup>. Unfortunately for possible complainants from Somes Island, the most incriminating letters the Government stopped were addressed to neutral consuls.

The New Zealand Government had one last parting “gift” for the couples whose marriages its internment practices ruined. It passed the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Amendment Act in 1919 to ensure that women of British (including New Zealand) birth could easily divorce repatriated “enemy alien” husbands. The only real catch was to prove that the husband left New Zealand for twelve months at some time since 4 August 1914. The wife also received guardianship of any minor children<sup>18</sup>.

Major Matheson’s transition back to private life from a position of considerable power, must also have been traumatic. Major-General A.W. Robin, Commander of New Zealand’s Military Forces, provided him with a glowing testimonial. He cited the entire satisfaction and the “very efficient” performance Matheson gave while commandant on Somes Island. His character was unimpeachable and he was “absolutely trustworthy in every respect.” Robin considered:

He could be relied upon at all times to carry out his duties with tact and firmness, and to the advantage of the Defence Department. I hope to hear that he is as successful in civil life as he has been in military, for I fully appreciate the strenuous times he had in the internment camp and the work well done<sup>19</sup>.

A list of weapons on Matheson’s personal file reveals that while a territorial officer he “specialised in the study of small arms and in instructions for their use”<sup>20</sup>. However, in 1922 he and his gun collection became the target of an anonymous phonecall to the police, who in turn searched his home. Matheson had just taken up a position at West End School, Palmerston North. Alice Matheson, meanwhile, had recently suffered a nervous breakdown. The focus of the phonecall was Matheson’s Government-owned 303 rifle<sup>21</sup>.

A shortage of trained teachers in the late 1920s led to Matheson’s return to his original profession. He became headmaster at Makirikiri School, Upokongaro, on the Whanganui River. In 1933 he retired and moved to Tauranga, where he became a Borough Councillor. He died there in 1944 aged 76<sup>22</sup>.

Major Osburne-Lilly’s personal file could not be traced at the Personnel Archive, Trentham, but having used his training as a lawyer (his career after giving up teaching) on behalf of the army in 1917<sup>23</sup>, it seems likely he would resume that occupation. Colonel Chaytor sailed for Egypt with the Main Body in 1914 and was twice wounded at Gallipoli in 1915. In 1916, Brigadier Chaytor commanded the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade in Egypt and was the senior New Zealand officer in that theatre of the war. In 1917, Major General Chaytor took command of the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division and received a knighthood in 1918. On his return to Wellington in 1919 he became general officer commanding New Zealand military forces<sup>24</sup>.

It was presumably a coincidence that the state of facilities on Somes Island came out around the time *Willochra* left Wellington. The crew of SS *Manuka*, quarantined on Somes in early May 1919, complained of the appalling conditions they endured there. Then on 15 May, the day after *Willochra* sailed, F.L. Dignan, a Catholic priest, sent a lengthy exposé to the *Evening Post* in support of their claims. He said that the Health Department had done practically nothing since it resumed control of the island six months earlier. While attending some dangerously ill patients there, he noted that boards in the old buildings were rotten, broken and thirsting for paint. Pillows, cardboard and sacking were stuffed into broken windows in an unsuccessful attempt to stop draughts. Floors were broken in some places and Dignan feared that people might break their legs.

As well as describing “filthy” sculleries, the lack of partitions between beds in some dormitories, also shocked Dignan. The occupants were, therefore, in full view of everyone else. In other cases, there were partitions between beds, but the front of the cubicle was open, also preventing privacy. Furthermore, many beds were bunks, while some bedsteads were forty years old and had poor quality mattresses. Lighting, with kerosene lamps, was another problem, especially as some lamps had broken globes. Dignan also complained of the lack of a mortuary.

The two sets of latrines, after years of heavy usage, were objects of disgust. Both corrugated iron buildings (one tar-covered and the other white-washed) were sited down a steep incline some distance from the main buildings. One latrine had no partition between the seats, while the other had partitions but was open in front. “The smell of these places is certainly not healthy, and they are a downright insult to decent people.”

Dignan also noted that dirty water, not to mention children, could easily fall down the island’s well, while the water supply was poor. Neither of the two baths available to quarantined people, had running water. Open drains and improper disposal of refuse, along with corresponding “bad odours”, were another problem. In addition to exposing the unsuitability of the shared kitchen facilities to the treatment of infectious diseases, he was stunned by the island’s meat safe. A converted box formerly used for transporting bulls, it was not only exposed to the sun, but also the gauze gratings contained holes large enough to admit rabbits.<sup>25</sup>

The following day the *Evening Post* published a report by Dr. Watt, District Health Officer, to the Hon. G.W. Russell, the Minister of Public Health. Watt found that the old buildings were most unsatisfactory and, due to their age, only worth renovating because this was quicker than replacing them. The Public Works Department was excavating a large water storage reservoir at this time, and this would permit the installation of a few extra water closets. However, the island still needed latrines of the “pan privy type with earth burial”. The two baths Dignan mentioned, did not have running water due to the island’s dependence on rainwater. Still, plenty of water was available if carried. Watt added that improvements to the facility, at a cost of £30,000, had been abandoned. However, a new plan for the Public Works Department to build more hutments was about to be actioned.<sup>26</sup>

Mr W.T. Young, secretary of the Federated Seaman’s Union, also complained to Russell as this time, on behalf of the SS *Manuka*’s crew. In addition to generally

agreeing with Dignan's description, his nineteenth complaint, and perhaps the most enlightening, was that patients could freely gaze "at the stars through the space where the roof ought to be."<sup>27</sup>

Russell inspected the island on 19 May and then informed an *Evening Post* reporter that he wished he had done this three or four months earlier.

The buildings (he said) are in the condition that might be expected after having been in occupation by German prisoners for nearly four years. That there are possible discomforts and inconveniences I am prepared to admit; but, at the same time, whatever is their condition, I think it was good enough for the persons who had occupied them for the last 3½ or 4 years.

Problems, such as water supply and the road between the wharf and buildings, caused so much trouble during the war. However, without a few hundred men to provide forced labour, the authorities quickly produced a reservoir. A new cable tramway to carry stores from the wharf was also planned.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>1</sup> K. Joosten, Rotterdam, to William Massey, Prime Minister, N.Z., 10/11/1921. AAAB 482/57a, Joosten, K. (NA)

<sup>2</sup> Alfred Kraut to Albert Lossau, 19/3/1919. AAAB 482/31a, Kraut, A. (NA)

<sup>3</sup> Major Brunt to Commandant, Narrow Neck Internment Camp, 20/3/1919. AAAB 482/31a (NA)

<sup>4</sup> Brig. Gen. G.S. Richardson to District Headquarters, N.Z. Military Forces, Auckland, 8/6/1920, other letters including 28/6/1920, including K. Joosten to William Massey, Prime Minister, 12/6/1920. AAAB 482/57a (NA)

<sup>5</sup> K. Joosten to William Massey, 12/6/1921 AAAB 482/57a (NA)

<sup>6</sup> F.H.D. Bell to K. Joosten, 8/8/1921 AAAB 482/57a (NA)

<sup>7</sup> K. Joosten to William Massey, 10/11/1921 AAAB 482/57a (NA)

<sup>8</sup> William Massey to K. Joosten, 18/1/1922 AAAB 482/57a (NA)

<sup>9</sup> EP 23/4/1920 8(4)

<sup>10</sup> IA 1 20/7/18, Bornhold, A.M.A. (NA)

<sup>11</sup> Exchange of letters, 24/6/1919-14/10/1920. AAAB 482/2a, Tamme, E.R.R. (NA)

<sup>12</sup> Personal correspondence with Erika Grundmann, Cortes Island, British Columbia, Canada. 4/11/1998.

<sup>13</sup> Alan Napier, British Consulate, Fiume, to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 5/10/1923. Prime Minister (N.Z.) to High Commissioner of N.Z., 11/1/1924. AAAB 482/5c Lenaz, L. (NA)

<sup>14</sup> J. Hislop, Internal Affairs Dept., to Secretary, Dept of External Affairs, 3/3/1926. J.D. Gray, Secretary, External Affairs, to Under Secretary, Dept. of Internal Affairs, 4/3/1926. AAAB 482/49b. Gebauer, P. (NA)

<sup>15</sup> L. Christmann, Hinzweiler, Germany, to N.Z. Government, 10/3/1927. AAAB 482/1b, Christmann, L. (NA)

<sup>16</sup> Administration Division, Defence Dept., to Custodian of Enemy Property, Public Trust Office (and other letters between 1918 and 1920), AAAB 482/39f Lemke, C. (NA)

<sup>17</sup> Exchange of letters 29/6/1920 to 5/10/1920. AAAB 449/52a, Complaints by POWs to American and Swiss Consuls (NA)

<sup>18</sup> AD 1 65/230 Divorce Proceedings - wives of deported aliens (NA)

<sup>19</sup> Major General A.W. Robin to 'To Whom it may Concern', 18/9/1919. No. 7118, Matheson (Personnel Archive, NZDF)

<sup>20</sup> Major Matheson to Superintendent of Police, 30/12/1920, No. 7118, Matheson (Personnel Archive, NZDF)

<sup>21</sup> Exchange of letter dated 31/8/1922 to 18/9/1922. No. 7118, Matheson, (Personnel Archive, NZDF)

<sup>22</sup> Lauridsen. p. 43

<sup>23</sup> FS 14/6/1917 2(5)

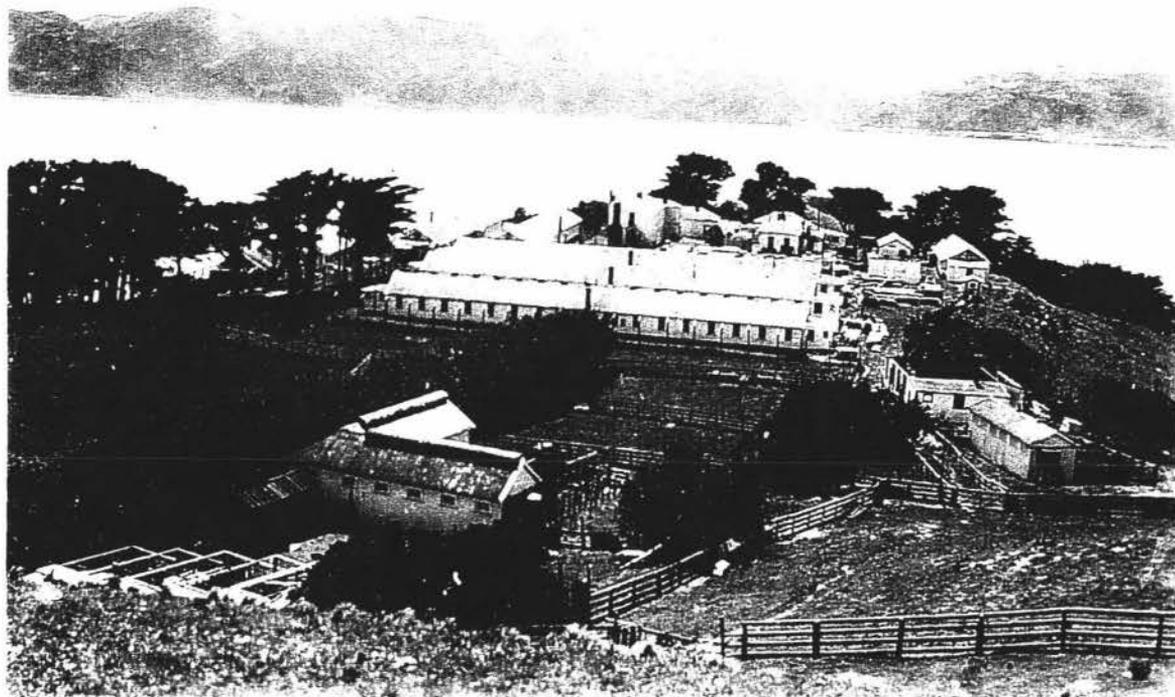
<sup>24</sup> Wicksteed. p. 94

<sup>25</sup> EP 15/5/1919 7(8)

<sup>26</sup> EP 16/5/1919 7(8)

<sup>27</sup> EP 16/5/1919 7(8-9)

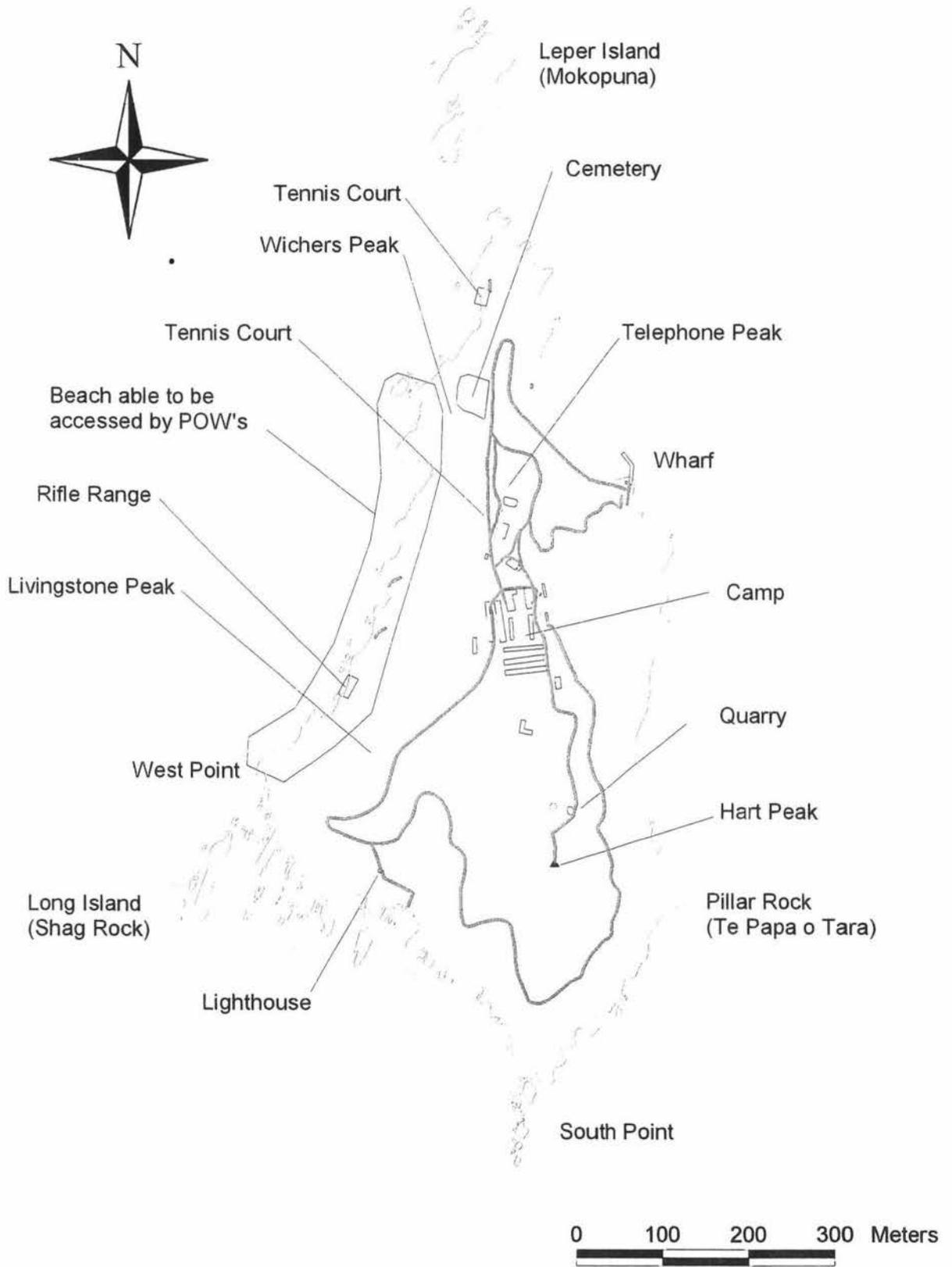
<sup>28</sup> EP 19/5/1919 8(9)



(Above) The twice-used Somes Island Internment Camp at the end of its days in 1946-7. The partly demolished YMCA building is behind the old cattle stable cum lock-up on the right. In the distance, the two-storey 1870s quarantine buildings are also under demolition. Of the three long hutments (military barracks) in the foreground, the far one served the internees during World War One, while the middle one served the guards. The closest hutment, and all the remaining ones, were built for quarantine purposes in 1919, in anticipation of another major epidemic. Nowadays only the left-hand end of the closest hutment remains, while the large now-disused livestock quarantine facility occupies much of the former camp site. Also remaining is the 1916 cattle stable in the left foreground and, in the distance, the 1918 hospital and nearby 1915 caretaker's house. The meat safe (used for bleeding newly-killed stock), which was created from a converted bull crate and bitterly criticised in 1919, also survives. With its value as a heritage building unappreciated, the old lock-up, in the right foreground, was demolished in the 1970s or 1980s. (Photo: Marion Robinson, née Weir, Collection, held by the Department of Conservation, Wellington Conservancy.)

(Next Page) The layout of Matiu / Somes Island as it appeared between 1919 and 1940, prior to the installation in 1942-3 of four 3.7-inch anti-aircraft guns and their concrete emplacements on the levelled-off top of the point(s) Major Matheson named as Hart Peak. Names of geographic sites are as they were according to a 1915 map prepared by Major Matheson following the escape of Wolf and Bilke, except those in brackets which are current names. The YMCA building, shown in the above photo, is, however, not marked on this map. While the origins of names of peaks on the island are uncertain, probably Hart Peak was named for Mr S. Hart, the World War One lighthouse keeper. Perhaps Wichers Peak is named for POW SI 84 Johannes Wicher, a middle-aged wharf labourer released to remain in New Zealand in December 1919. Telephone Peak was associated with the camp's telephone system. Internee forced labour built the road that circles the island, while the longer, (more user-friendly) road from the wharf was built with paid internee labour. "Kulture Bay", which is not yet conclusively identified, is one of the small bays at the top right end of the island. (Map supplied by the Department of Conservation, Wellington Conservancy)

# Matiu / Somes Island



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 Glen Middendorf, Queenstown  
 Bob Milverton, Palmerston North  
 Richard Nester, Wellington  
 Wilma Phillips, Eastbourne  
 Laurie Rands, Silverdale, Auckland  
 Ann Sheeran, Levin  
 David Wiseman, Lower Hutt

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**Abbreviations**

AJHR	Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives
AWN	Auckland Weekly News
DOC	Department of Conservation
Dom	The Dominion
EP	Evening Post
ES	Manawatu Evening Standard
FS	Feilding Star
MDT	Manawatu Daily Times
MH	Manawatu Herald
NA	National Archives Head Office, Wellington
NZDF	New Zealand Defence Force
NZH	New Zealand Herald
NZPD	New Zealand Parliamentary Debates
POW	Prisoner of War
WC	Wanganui Chronicle
WTU	Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington