

Excerpt from *Welt am Montag*, published by German prisoners at Trial Bay Internment Camp, 20 January 1918

MLMSS 261/Box 13/ 20 Jan 1918, opp. p10

Military trial in Auckland

The following military trial report, which refers to this year's 4 January issue of the *Fiji Times*, deals with the escape of Count von Luckner and 10 other prisoners of war.

Lieutenant Colonel Turner states that on 9 May 1915 he took over from Captain Winthrop as camp leader. He was by no means informed with regards to the system according to which the island had been guarded until then. Captain Winthrop was not present when the witness took command. Prior to his arrival in Auckland, he reported to the General Command in Wellington to inspect the files of the warehouse administration. It was, however, not clear from the files how the camp was organised and managed. Therefore, Lieutenant Colonel Turner came to Auckland without a specific plan as to how to manage the camp or to administer the guard. He was then told that the camp administration was subordinate to the Department of Coastal Defense and Capt. Meikle could give him more information. However, Capt. Meikle was not able to do that.

The witness visited the island a few days before taking command. Captain Winthrop was present at the time, but did not speak to the witness, although the latter stayed for some time on the island. All the witness was able to learn was the location of the different buildings. When he officially took over the camp, it emerged that there was no management plan and that the commander was free to employ as many people as he wanted. There were two telephone lines, one to Auckland and another to Waiheke. The lines were above ground and unguarded. The patrols were able to observe the lines, but there were no provisions for special guarding.

Colonel MacDonald: "Was there a control to prevent visitors smuggling small packages or letters into the camp?"

Witness: "I was always against camp visitors because of the danger that they might bring letters and the like to the prisoners. I always had the feeling that this was a weak spot. Because of that, I did not approve any more visitor passports, but they were still issued above my head by senior officers or the authorities."

Colonel MacDonald: "Were the prisoners allowed to stay alone with their visitors?"

Witness: "Only the married ones."

Chairman: "No one else?"

Witness: "It depended on who the visitor was."

The witness further states that based on economic considerations the island guard had been reduced from 36 to 24 men. Given the nature and leadership of the 80 civilian prisoners, this provision was considered entirely sufficient. The same system remained in place when the officers of the *Seeadler*¹ were delivered on Oct. 8, 1917. (The trial was adjourned)

¹ "SMS Seeadler was a German raider under the command of Lieutenant Captain Felix von Luckner. After a successful cruise in the Atlantic von Luckner moved to the Pacific and his ship was wrecked on Mopeilia, one of the Society Islands group, in 1917. Von Luckner and five others attempted to capture a ship to rescue his stranded men, but they were themselves captured and sent to New Zealand as prisoners of war." <http://navymuseum.co.nz/sms-seeadler/>

Central Information Center for Emigrants

The following is an excerpt of a letter that was kindly provided to us: ...the recently concluded German-British agreement on the accommodation of sick and injured civilians in Holland without authorisation to return home initially applies only to those internees detained in Great Britain and Ireland. On account of the complete lack of suitable maritime transport and above all the considerable current danger of overseas travel, those detained in British possessions overseas unfortunately cannot be included at this time. Attempts to achieve similar benefits for overseas internees will, however, continue...

Director of the Central Information Center for Emigrants, signed Schulte im Hofe