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Karl Hanssen's Samoan War Diaries, August 1914-May 1915

A German Perspective on New Zealand's Military Occupation of German Samoa

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The Background to Karl Hanssen's Samoan War Diaries 1914-1915

1. German Accounts of the New Zealand Occupation of German Samoa

Less than a month after war was officially declared in Europe in 1914, Samoa felt its effect. As Samoa was not only a German colony but also a strategic and well-equipped location for wireless communications, the capture of Samoa became an urgent necessity for Allied forces. This imperial imperative was accepted by the government of New Zealand. On 29 August, the harbour of Apia was surprised by the arrival of a sizeable fleet of Allied warships. After coasting into the harbour with intimidating military fanfare and trawling the harbour for mines, the fleet then proceeded to deploy first the paperwork of military occupation, and then, boat by boat, a roughly 1400-strong force of New Zealand soldiers. With not a single shot fired in attack or defence, the government of Samoa was transformed from a German "Schutzgebiet" to a New Zealand military administration, with full authority placed in the hands of Colonel Robert Logan, a British migrant to New Zealand whose primary occupation was running a sheep farm in Otago, though his army experience was extensive enough for him to have risen to the rank of commander of the Auckland Military District.[1] It was his "good business ability" stemming from his farming experience and positions of power on his local council that inspired New Zealand authorities to select him for the daunting task of administrating Samoa.[2] Of course, nobody could have known at the time how later years would reveal Logan's experience and demeanour to be completely mismatched with his deeply significant new job.

There are a number of first-person accounts that can be used to analyse and understand the German perspective of events in Samoa during the World War I era. Probably the best known are the lavishly detailed published diary of author Frieda Zieschank, who made Samoa her home when her husband was appointed as one of German Samoa's few resident doctors in 1906,[3] and the diary kept by the German writer and artist Erich Scheurmann, published in 1935.[4] Another significant diary from wartime Samoa, kept by the planter and scientist Ernst Demandt, is worthy of separate reproduction in its entirety, a task which goes well beyond the scope

1 Michael Field, *Black Saturday: New Zealand's Tragic Blunders in Samoa,* Auckland, Reed 2006, p. 29.

2 Hermann J. Hiery, *The Neglected War: the German South Pacific and the Influence of World War I,* Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press 1995 [=Hiery (1995b)], p. 157.

3 F. Zieschank, *Ein Jahrzehnt in Samoa (1906-1916)*, Leipzig, E. Haberland 1918.

4 E. Scheurmann, *Erinnerungen aus der Besetzungszeit Samoas*, Korbach, Verlag Wilhelm Bing 1935.

of this present publication.[5] Further German commentaries include an official account for German authorities by assistant surveyor Paul Arendt,[6] and reports by the former manager of the German plantation company Deutsche Handels- und Plantagengesellschaft (DHPG) Otto Riedel, resident schoolteacher H. Sawade, and exiled governor Dr Erich Schultz-Ewerth (usually referred to as "Dr Schultz").[7] Each of these accounts serves as a valid and important source for the investigation of the New Zealand occupation of German Samoa.

The significance of the diaries kept by Karl Hanssen is that they were not written for general publication, nor were they compiled in retrospect, as were the published diaries mentioned above. Thus we can assume that they document this same period with considerable authenticity. They were secret diaries, hidden in everyday objects like butter boxes and smuggled in small sections right through to Germany. Karl Hanssen was the manager of the copra production company DHPG, by far the biggest company in operation in Samoa when the Allied forces arrived. In amongst pages of shipping schedules and copra prices, Hanssen's diaries also contain numerous reports, rumours, observations and cutting remarks which ran counter to the strict censorship regulations put in place by the new Military Administration, to the extent that discovery of one diary led to his arrest and New Zealand internment in 1915. As an active, influential figure in Apia's settler society and a powerful overseer of much of Samoa's imports and exports, Hanssen was considered by many in this society to be the highest authority figure in the wake of the wartime internment of the former Governor, Dr Schultz. As such, Hanssen documents life in New Zealand-occupied Samoa through the eyes of a figure of authority who invites attention and suspicion from the New Zealand administrator, resulting in his experiencing personally that officious harassment and military misgovernment which he reports in his diaries. The length and depth of Hanssen's diaries, as well as the circumstances behind them, make them some of the richest and least problematic sources of information for an alternative perspective on Samoa's experience of World War I.

Unsurprisingly, Hanssen, Scheurmann, Demandt and their fellow Germans found cause for complaint from the very moment the New Zealand troops set foot in Apia. It has generally been assumed that the New Zealand administration of

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5 The Ernst Demandt diaries are held at the Bundesarchiv Koblenz (KlErw 812/1-6).

6 P. Arendt, "Bericht des Vermessungs-Assistenten Arendt über die Zustände in Samoa" (unpublished manuscript), RKA 1001/2625-29, Bundesarchiv Berlin.

7 See O. Riedel, *Der Kampf um Deutsch-Samoa: Erinnerungen eines Hamburger Kaufmanns*, Berlin, Deutscher Verlag 1938; H. Sawade, "Meine Kriegserlebnisse in Deutsch-Samoa vom August 1914 bis Januar 1916," *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung* 33 (1916):53-127; E. Schultz-Ewerth, *Erinnerungen an Samoa*, Berlin, August Scherl 1926.

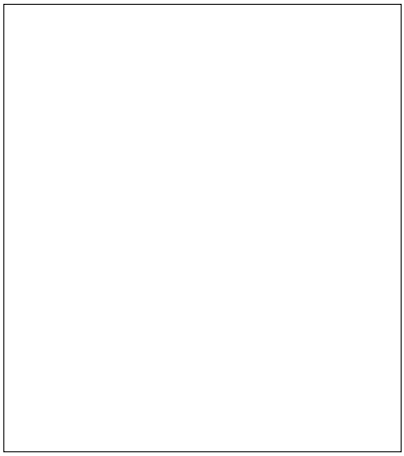

Figure 1. Karl Hanssen (Schultz album, Tui Parr Kronfeld Collection).

Samoa was at least competent, and was effective in retaining and upholding the same laws that were put into place under the German regime.[8] Recent works by Michael Field and Hermann Hiery, however, have called for a dramatic reassessment of such assumptions, instead arguing that the wartime and post-war New Zealand rule over Samoa led the whole nation swiftly backwards by undoing social and economic progress achieved under Solf and Schultz, neglecting the Samoans and persecuting the Germans.[9] While criticism of decisions made and actions taken under New Zealand's post-war mandate in Samoa – most definitely those resulting in the influenza epidemic, as well as more widespread casual racism and arrogance – is nothing new,[10] it seems the five years spanning wartime itself have been overlooked by nearly all except Plimmer and Hiery, and are definitely in need of further investigation. The German accounts by no means hold all the answers, but they are a great and relatively unexplored source from which we can continue to test the validity of what has so far been written about New Zealand's behaviour as a colonising force in the Pacific.

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8 W. N. Plimmer, *The Military Administration of Western Samoa, 1914-1920*, MA thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1966. See also I. C. Campbell, 'New Zealand and the Mau in Samoa'. *New Zealand Journal of History*, 33(1):92-110, 1999.

9 Field's work can be considered an authority on the first of these accusations, and Hiery's on the latter.

10 See, for instance, Michael Field, *Mau: Samoa's struggle for freedom,* Auckland, Polynesian Press 1991, and Mary Boyd, "Racial Attitudes of New Zealand Officials in Western Samoa", *New Zealand Journal of History* 21(1):139-155, 1987.

2. The Historical and Political Context

The New Zealand military administration and its subsequent mandate which stretched out over most of the twentieth century was a colonising force which, upon erasing any significant trace of the previous colonial presence, the Germans, sought to forge its own sense of powerful administrative place in Samoa. The German administration sought to govern the Samoans with a paternalistic set of restrictions designed to protect the *fa'a Samoa* (the "Samoan way" of life and government) through policies centred on racial differentiation. Democracy was at that time not the basic tenet of government that the modern Western world so often assumes it to be – in the eyes of many German settlers on Samoa it was in fact a threat, a dangerous folly. Many Germans in Samoa, including Karl Hanssen (see diary entry of 11 December 1914), were fearful of the detrimental effect of the occupying soldiers' seemingly novel attitudes upon a Samoan population accustomed to a quietly imposing sense of social hierarchy. For the New Zealanders, on the other hand, democracy and egalitarianism were regarded as fundamental attributes of a fledgling nation seeking a sense of difference and superiority over the mother of the empire, Great Britain, with its own rigid class structure.[11] New Zealand had also had its own ambitions in regard to Samoa, the New Zealand Governor having stated in his Speech from the Throne at the opening of parliament in 1894: "The protracted confusion still disturbing Samoa has induced my Advisers to urge upon the Imperial Government that England should utilise this colony to control and manage the Navigator Islands."[12]

The westernmost islands of Samoa had been subject to German rule for just fifteen years when the New Zealanders arrived to claim the territory for the British Empire. European presence on the islands was, however, deeply ingrained into

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11 For a concise explanation of early New Zealand populism and its influence, see James Belich's *Paradise Reforged*, Auckland, Penguin Press, 2001, pp. 22f. It has been argued by Meleisea in *The Making of Modern Samoa*, Suva, Institute of Pacific Studies of the University of the South Pacific 1987, that by loosening the more paternalistic German colonial policy's grasp on Samoan life, the New Zealand administration began to pave the way to Samoan autonomy as soon as they arrived.

12 The German Consul in Sydney quotes this speech in a letter dated 26 September 1894 to the German Reichskanzler. He also quotes New Zealand Prime Minister Seddon's statement in Parliament on 21 August 1894 that the treaty Powers "did not see their way to accept the offer of New Zealand for which he was very sorry." In July of the same year, "residents and property holders" in Samoa (among them 35 Germans, 3 Scandinavians, 2 British and 2 Americans), had signed a petition to the Emperor of Germany urging him to annex Samoa. Bundesarchiv Berlin, R 1001/2870.

Samoa's history – early European contact with Samoa dates as far back as 1722[13] and begins to take the form of ambitious land claims, religious missions and increasing involvement in local power struggles (with visible self-interest) from about 1830 onwards.[14] With the majority of foreign interest in Samoa stemming from Britain, Germany, and the United States, the imperial fervour possessing the "Great Powers" of the time inevitably resulted in diplomatic tension. Together with the ongoing battles of Samoan civil wars sparked by a land ownership system complicated by foreign intervention and conflict amongst traditional authorities, this left Samoa at the end of the nineteenth century as a region torn in many directions by disputes over power – from both Samoan and European perspectives.

Great Britain, the USA and Germany, the colonial powers which had shown such interest in Samoa, reached their own compromise with the 1899 partitioning of the islands into two separately governed territories: the eastern islands of Tutuila and the Manu'a group were placed under American naval administration, while the western islands of 'Upolu and Savai'i were declared a German colony, fitting conveniently with pre-existing German business interest in the area, though it has been argued to be "the least preferable" option from one Samoan stance.[15] Great Britain backed off from Samoa entirely in exchange for a few German concessions of colonial territory elsewhere in the Pacific. One significant premise of the agreement signed between colonial commissioners and the warring Samoan factions supporting rival chiefs Mata'afa and Malietoa upon split German-American annexation of the islands was that "Samoan affairs were to be left to the Samoans as far as possible"[16] – a ruling which the Germans soon adhered to in a flurry of bureaucracy and segregation laws. With that, the two separate Samoan nations came into existence and headed down their separate paths.

The first administrator of the newly declared German Samoa, Wilhelm Solf, saw himself in the role of father to every Samoan. John Moses describes the basic assumption behind Solf's colonial policy thus: "the Samoans were as yet children and had to be protected from the predatory white man and from their own ignorance and factionalism".[17] The extent to which this rhetoric was put into action during Solf's regime can be traced by focusing on his dealings with one

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13 Peter Hempenstall, *Pacific Islanders under German Rule*, Canberra, Australian National University Press 1978, p. 25.

14 Meleisea, 21.

15 Albert Wendt, *Guardians and Wards: a Study of the Origins, Causes and the First Two Years of the Mau in Western Samoa*, MA thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1965, p. 23.

16 Kennedy cited by Meleisea, p. 42.

17 J.A. Moses, "The Solf regime in Western Samoa: Ideal and Reality", *New Zealand Journal of History* 6(1):52, 1972.

such "predatory white man" in particular: the German cocoa planter and avid Pan-German colonist, Richard Deeken, the subject of a particularly uncharitable entry in Karl Hanssen's diary (8 January 1915). Stewart Firth's account of the ideological and verbal conflict between German settlers and Solf's Administration relates how Deeken took to promoting Samoa as an excellent destination for exactly the kind of settler Solf was keen to exclude from the colony – his book *Manuia Samoa!* was full of pictures of scantily clad Samoan women and promises of a glowing excess of exploitable land and people at the full disposal of anyone wishing to swap a mundane and mediocre job in Germany for the prestige and wealth of a career in cocoa planting.[18] The planting itself – like any other form of hard labour – would not be the domain of any German lured over to Samoa by Deeken's promises of available land (and women), but rather the duty of a workforce of contentedly overworked and underpaid non-white labourers. In so doing, Deeken appealed to a vague and fantastic notion of the "South Seas" which seemed to be a recurring trope in the imagination of Wilhelmine German popular culture.[19]

Deeken's assumption that German Samoa would be run much the same way as, say, German South West Africa was completely contrary to Solf's intentions for the German administration's role in Samoa. Solf was in his thirties and hence relatively young when he took up the reins of administrative power in Samoa, and was the product of a cosmopolitan upbringing in the increasingly liberal environment of the bourgeois corners of Wilhelmine Berlin. On top of this, he had also pursued academic study as an indologist, which allows us to believe he was in command of a comparatively non-Eurocentric worldview.[20] To him, the idea of forcing the people of his colony into plantation labour was abhorrent – German colonial territories were given the title *Schutzgebiet*, the rough English equivalent being "protectorate", and Solf took this title quite literally and very seriously. Wareham argues that Solf and Deeken were in fact in command of "very similar" [21] attitudes, both striving towards the salvation of a people and pursuing this goal in terms of race and racial difference, the only real distinction being that Solf's intention was to preserve Samoan culture, while Deeken's work was all done for the benefit of the people and culture of a somewhat overcrowded and under-resourced Germany. Be that as it may, given the pressures of exploitative Eurocentric colonists like Deeken and his followers, Solf's line of policy was definitely preferable.

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18 Stuart Firth, "Governors versus Settlers: the Dispute over Chinese Labour in German Samoa", *New Zealand Journal of History*, 11(2):159, 1977.

19 See Kathrin DiPaola, *Samoa – 'Perle' der deutschen Kolonien? 'Bilder' des exotischen Anderen in Geschichte[n] des 20. Jahrhunderts*, PhD thesis, University of Maryland, 2004.

20 Firth, p. 156.

21 Emily Wareham, *Race and Realpolitik: the Politics of Colonisation in German Samoa* [=*Germanica Pacifica* 1], Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang 2002, p. 67.