

9 CONSULS AND CRUISERS: THE GERMAN NAVAL INTELLIGENCE SYSTEM IN EAST ASIA AND AUSTRALIA

The broader picture

The *Marine-Kriegsnachrichtenwesen* (Naval War Intelligence System) was well established in East Asia as early as 1898, as a communication from the chief of the then Cruiser Division concerning agents in Colombo, Singapore, Saigon, Hong Kong, Amoy, Vladivostok, Seoul, Kobe, and Yokohama shows.¹ It is an indication of the purpose with which Germany embarked on its naval preparations that a formal overseas Intelligence System for the Navy was established on a regular foundation even before that of the Army.²

This reflected the preoccupation of Wilhelm II, Naval Secretary Alfred von Tirpitz, and Foreign Secretary (later Chancellor) Bernhard von Bülow with expanding Germany's naval strength and thus the nation's influence, ensuring it would be able to play a deciding part in world affairs as a power among powers. From the beginning there was close cooperation between the Foreign Office and the Navy. In 1899, warship commanders were reminded that Imperial Consulates were obliged to provide every reasonable support. Intelligence gathered by the Consulates was to be forwarded to the nearest naval commander, and in cases where it appeared justified also to the Foreign Office for forwarding to the Admiralty Staff.³

Despite frequently issued specific guidelines and directives, the Naval Intelligence network was at ground level a fairly loose operation dependent upon individuals operating with considerable flexibility. It was based on a pool of 'Reporters' (*Berichterstatter*) and 'Confidants' (*Vertrauensmänner*), whose functions often were combined, responsible to a 'Chief Reporter' acting in close cooperation with the regional Consul-General and naval Station Senior Officer. The Reporters were responsible for gathering a range of material of general military use and kept track of shipping movements. The Confidants' most important function was to be performed in the official period of 'Tension' prior to any conflict. They had to ensure that coal and supplies were obtained unobtrusively, loaded onto steamers designated as supply vessels or for conversion to auxiliary cruisers, and dispatched before any embargos on coal exports or impounding of vessels could take place. The Confidant was expected to show 'a high degree of independence; correspondingly a great deal will be required on him. Decisiveness, willingness to assume responsibility...also to take a gamble, and no fear of danger are requirements which must be displayed'.⁴ It was recognised that appeals to patriotism might not suffice: all services were to be adequately recompensed 'as only then will some Reporters have the feeling of a binding duty'.⁵

¹ Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg (BA-MA), RM38/v 40, Bl.16, 33, Diederichs-Knorr, 28 May 1898. Agents were already stationed in Amoy, Hong Kong, Kobe, Saigon, Seoul, Singapore, Yokohama and Vladivostok.

² RM5/v 3682, Bl.19. Even by 1914, the German General Staff had no organised secret service operation in Britain (as it did in France and Russia). In peacetime the Army relied on the Services of diplomats and military attachés, and occasionally journalists. See P. Knightley, *Second Oldest Profession. The Spy as Bureaucrat, Patriot, Fantasist and Whore* (London:Deutsch, 1986), 26f.

³ RM5/v 6256, Bl.138, directive in 'Acta betr. Mobilmachungübersicht des Kreuzergeschwaders 1904-8', restating the 1899 directives.

⁴ RM38/v 126, Bl.127, 'Etappenwesen', in 'S.M. Schiffe im Auslande während des Krieges', 1914.

⁵ RM5/v 3682, Bl.16, Diederichs-Kirchhoff, 25 April 1902.



In Australia this was not a problem as the Honorary Consuls, usually businessmen of independent means, were deeply committed to the ideals of *Deutschtum*, and the Reporters and Confidants were either civil servants, for example, the Commercial Attaché (Handelssachverständiger) **Walter de Haas**⁶ in Sydney and or prosperous individuals such as Oscar Plate, the North German Lloyd (NDL) shipping agent in Sydney.

Much emphasis was laid on recruitment. No means were to be left unused 'to interest and prepare suitable persons for intelligence purposes'. Connections with the local press were to be fostered. There were specific instructions for using the press to spread false reports of naval shipping movements and to confuse an enemy response prior to and after the outbreak of hostilities.⁷ Some newspapers had a more direct involvement. In 1913, the Admiralty Staff arranged for the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* to act as a cover address for the receipt of dispatches. In wartime its overseas correspondents would be placed at the disposal of Naval Intelligence, and reports would be telegraphed to the cover address in Berlin. In this manner, suspicion by the British authorities would not be aroused.⁸ The Navy also concluded formal agreements with the NDL and HAL (Hamburg Amerika Linie) shipping lines for the involvement of their steamer captains in the Intelligence System. A 1909 agreement stated that while ships were in waters of the East Asian Station, they were to observe movements of named British warships on the China, East Indies, and Australia Station, and to provide this information to the nearest German consular post or warship for forwarding to the Cruiser Squadron.⁹

The structure on the East Asian Station

The measures employed for gathering intelligence were basic: personal observations of incoming and outgoing merchant and naval ships, inconspicuous conversations with persons in government, the shipping trade, docks, the local press, and so on. The information and written material collected by the Chief Reporter was assessed by the Senior Officer of the Station and a report forwarded to the Chief of Admiralty Staff. The Consul-General also monitored and reported on the effectiveness of agents and operations.



The Admiralty Staff encouraged feedback on the comprehensiveness and clarity of instructions, as well as suggestions for improving the system. In a reply to a

⁶ Walter de Haas was the former head of Department III in the Foreign Office (British Empire, United States and South Africa), *Ministerialdirektor Dr.h.c.*, initially worked as a businessman. In 1903 he became a commercial advisor at the Consulate-General in Sydney. During the war he was interned. After his return to Germany in 1919 he entered the foreign service, becoming a ministerial director in 1926.

⁷ RM5/v 5972, Bl.127, 'Zum Immediatvortrag', October 1910.

⁸ In return for this cooperation, the editors would have exclusive access to Admiralty Staff or Army information passed for publication. RM5/v 3681, Bl.82, 'Abmachung zwischen der Redaktion des Berliner Lokal-Anzeigers und dem Admiralstabe über die Unterstützung des Nachrichtendienstes im Kriege', September 1913.

⁹ RM5/v 3660, Bl.69, 'Entwurf für eine Sonderabmachung des Kreuzergeschwaders mit den Direktionen des Norddeutschen Lloyds und der Hamburg-Amerika-Linie...', Admiralty Staff, 25 July 1909.

letter from Squadron Chief Admiral Richard von Richard Geissler in 1902 concerning a closer cooperation between the Squadron and Admiralty Staff in intelligence matters, Chief of Staff Otto von Diederichs stated that this was not only most welcome, but 'urgently required in consideration of a thorough preparation for war...The Intelligence System is dependent upon the ongoing cooperation between the Admiralty Staff and the commands of the foreign service units'. The concern was for simplicity and unity of activity so that all commanders, regardless of what Station they were on, could obtain useful information without having to refer to numerous official directives.¹⁰ Korvettenkapitän Seiferling (*Möwe*) noted local defences in 1902 and made a more detailed examination of Townsville's importance in the mineral and foodstuff export trade which went almost exclusively to Britain. This provided a description of harbour fortifications complete with photographs.¹¹ This is particularly relevant considering operational orders for bombardment of harbour infrastructure and port facilities on the Australian east coast in wartime.

The structure of the East Asian Station was modeled on that already existing on the East American Station. Where possible, the functions of Confidant and Reporter were not to be assigned to the Consuls, rather it was preferred that they exercise a supervisory and advisory function. An insight into the Navy's attitude to working with civilians was that the Consuls had to be kept to strict adherence to the outlined procedures, as being 'Foreign Office' types they would be inclined to operate independently. Official designations were Chief Reporter (*Hauptberichterstatter*-HBE); Reporter (*Berichterstatter*-BE), combined Reporter-Confidant (BE [V]), and intelligence gatherer not subject to formal induction (*Nachrichtensammler*- BE[S]). The East Asian Station was divided into three regions headed by a Chief Reporter in Tokyo, Shanghai, and Singapore. In war with Britain, Batavia assumed responsibility for Singapore and Sydney, given the restrictions that would be placed on them.¹²

In November 1902 Geissler reported on what he considered the minimum requirements for an effective system, given the various and challenging tasks assigned the Cruiser Squadron, and which required almost constant changes in ship dispositions and the associated information this required. In peacetime the Squadron's needs in coal, provisions, and general matériel in the first months of a war, and where and how they would be obtained and shipped had to be determined in great detail. Points of attack against the enemy, the strength and manoeuvrability of its forces, the nature and volume of trade, the conditions and fortifications of coastal cities all had to be determined. Conditions in areas of prospective conflict had to be checked for their possible influence on ship movements and the conduct of operations.¹³

This makes clear the German interest in Anglo-Australian defence measures, trade and shipping movements, railways and transport, and the extremely detailed cartographic and oceanographic studies that were undertaken in waters that would be likely routes and operational fields, or at remote anchorages which could serve as assembly and supply sites. Communication, essential for the Squadron's effective operation, was given priority. Posts had to be created which provided the Squadron with an unbroken telegraphic link with the outside world. The Chief Reporters were 'the connection between Admiralty Staff and the Squadron Command on the one side, and the Reporters of their area on the other'. Geissler placed emphasis on the cultivation of personal connections as a means for creating sources and channels of information.

A key part of the regular visit of warships to Australian ports were the frequent contacts, indeed friendships, of officers with naval, military, commercial, and government officials. An Admiralty Staff Officer was assigned to coordinate this activity.¹⁴ Geissler also saw

¹⁰ RM5/v 3682, Diederichs-Geissler, 25 April 1902.

¹¹ RM5/v 5972, Bl.31, Commander *Möwe*-Chief of Admiralty Staff, 2 April 1902; Bl. 39, 4 April 1902.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ RM5/v 5968, Bl.157, Geissler-Kaiser, 9 November 1902.

¹⁴ Admiralty Staff Officers were usually graduates of two courses at the Naval Academy. One junior and one senior officer was attached to the Cruiser Squadrons. RM2/1553, Marine Kabinett. Organisation des Admiralstabes der Marine, Bd.1, 153, 227.

the necessity for a close working relationship with Reporters in the United States, who in the event of war or unfriendly relations with Britain and Japan would play an essential part in forwarding intelligence and obtaining coal and supplies. This importance would increase with the operation of the US-Philippines cable which facilitated speedy communication of the Squadron's requirements to agents in the United States.¹⁵

The Chief Reporter (in Australia this was the Consul-general in Sydney) held the cover addresses for communication with the Admiralty Staff and lists of other Chief Reporters and Reporters with their allocated number and code name, location, function, telegram and postal addresses. Where possible the actual wording of messages was to be composed in commercial language. Other businesses used similarly compatible language, trade names and designations to indicate harbour barriers, fort armaments, removal of maritime signs, departure of troop transports and so on. It was left to each Reporter to work out a suitable system whose commercial terminology matched his occupation and thus would not arouse suspicion. Such systems 'can only fulfil their purpose if they give telegrams and letters a strong appearance of reality'.¹⁶

In 1904 the Station was divided into five Zones (*Etappen*). The three key operatives were a naval officer as coordinator with the designation Zone Officer, the Consul, and the mercantile member (usually the Confidant). The Zones were based on Shanghai (Admiralty Staff Officer from the Cruiser Squadron), Tsingtao, Yokohama (Naval Attaché), Hong Kong (commander of *SMS Tsingtau*), and Batavia which included responsibility for the Australian Station (First Officer of Hong Kong based warship). The importance of this structure was that

... the successful conduct of warfare rests with Zone Stations distributed across the world. It is their task to procure for warships the necessary support vessels, coal, provisions and general matériel, as well as the outfitting of auxiliary cruisers. They must support the overseas war effort with all the means at their disposal...The collection, assessment, and forwarding of intelligence from Zone to Zone, from the Zone to warships, and to the Admiralty Staff constitutes one of the most important branches of war service, on which success or failure could depend.¹⁷

The Zone Officer was the representative of the Senior Naval Officer of the Station, and decided the type, amount, and specific order of shipments. In peacetime he also allocated merchant vessels in his region suitable for conversion to auxiliaries to their respective assembly points, and composed directives for German and neutral ships to be used as transports. In Zones where there was a Naval Attaché, he would assume the task of Zone Officer in wartime.

The Consuls supported naval operations overseas insofar as they could within the bounds laid down by the Foreign Office.¹⁸ They had to be fully aware of all the measures to be implemented in wartime, and exercised oversight of preparations until the Zone Officer arrived. The civilian agents, under the cover of their firms, were to organise the support vessels and find reliable crew to sail with them, and arrange supplies. To implement this smoothly, contracts were arranged between the Government and shipping companies, which placed not only their crucial coal supplies but also lines of credit at the disposal of the Navy. Similar arrangements were made with German banks and firms, and in the key Zones these would be supplemented by credits from Germany on the outbreak of war.¹⁹

While Zone Officers were subordinate to the Squadron Command, they operated quite independently as distance and isolation dictated. They had a key function in acquiring and directing movement of supply ships within their Zone, fulfilling specific requests from the

¹⁵ RM5/v 5968, Geissler-Kaiser, 9 November 1902.

¹⁶ RM5/v 3682, Diederichs-Geissler, 25 April 1902.

¹⁷ RM38/v 126, Bl. 127, 'Etappenwesen', 1914.

¹⁸ A Foreign Office directive of 13 May 1899 explicitly enjoined Consular participation 'as far as this is possible without the necessity for special organisation from the seat of office'. RM5/v 3682, Diederichs-Geissler, 25 April 1902.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Admiralty Staff, and working in close cooperation with local Consuls. As their activity had to remain undetected they took on civilian appearance and status where they lived. In peacetime, all instructions and other documents were kept either on board the local Station warship or at the Consulate. The latter provided the most resources. The 'Blue Book' contained addresses and codenames of agents, code keys and instructions for use, a copy of the secret assembly and transshipment locations for the supply of warships and conversion of merchant auxiliaries, lists of naval shipping movements, copies of the agreement concluded between the Admiralty Staff and the Consul, and of contracts with local firms. The Consul also held the dispatch book for communication with the Admiralty Staff in Berlin.²⁰

The Zone Officers had a crucial function with the declaration of mobilisation. The initial order would come from the Squadron Commander under normal circumstances, but with a sudden outbreak of hostilities news of declaration of war would suffice to set the program in motion. The first task was to ensure the Reporters were on a war footing to secure the supply of information on enemy military and naval preparations, and that the Squadron Command and Admiralty Staff were informed of positions of enemy vessels and land forces. Subsequent tasks included the purchase and shipment of coal for auxiliary cruisers and supply steamers. It was stressed that given general conditions, specific orders would not be possible. Initiative, careful consideration of options, and circumspect dealing were the preconditions for success.²¹

The Reporters and Confidants in Batavia, Surabaya, and Macassar cooperated to ensure that trustworthy Germans travelled on the regular steamers of the Dutch Royal Packet Company throughout the Indies. These agents had the job of informing their Reporter/Confidant by telegraph of everything they observed, especially naval shipping movements and defence installations in harbours visited. For Batavia the priority was observation of movements in the straits west of Borneo to Singapore and the Malacca Strait, for Surabaya the straits east of Java to New Guinea, and for Macassar the Macassar Strait and the route Surabaya-Macassar.²² The significance of this activity lies in these straits being the main merchant shipping routes into the Indian Ocean, and their planned use by the Cruiser Squadron for its advance to Australasian waters.



Squadron Chief Friedrich von Ingenohl noted in 1909 that obtaining sufficient intelligence on enemy shipping movements to enable the Squadron to effectively prepare for war could be solved only when continuous telegraphic reports were sent by warships, consuls, and the captains of postal steamers. 'Given the military situation on the East Asian Station, I regard it as essential that the shipping movements of all nations be included in this peacetime transmission of intelligence by telegraph.' This involved increased activity by individual warships, and the cooperation of the Foreign Office and shipping companies.²³

In February 1910 Ingenohl met with Singapore Consul-General Richard Kiliani and the Reporter and Confidant to discuss the collaboration of the Consulate-General in the Intelligence System, and the activity of the Singapore Zone during a period of 'Tension' and in wartime. All three agreed that the most intense observation by British authorities

²⁰ RM5/v 5968, Bl.152, Geissler-Kaiser, 15 November 1903; RM5/v 5969, 'Etappen-Instruktionen', Chief of Cruiser Squadron (Kirchhoff), 10 November 1904.

²¹ Ibid.

²² RM5/v 3661, Bl.88, Spee-Heeringen, 7 June 1913.

²³ RM5/v 3660, Bl.65, Ingenohl-Baudissin, 25 July 1909.

could be expected, and that even peacetime preparations had to be undertaken with extreme caution. Ingenohl proposed that from time to time dummy intelligence telegrams between the Singapore and Shanghai Consulates-General be sent to confuse the British. Singapore was a key intelligence post, and apart from the services of the Consul-General, Ingenohl commented of the Intelligence Reporter that 'his energy, professionalism and national pride are the guarantee that the Cruiser Squadron will find in Singapore all the support possible given the particularly unfavourable conditions in this place'.²⁴ The periodic friction between the Admiralty and Foreign Office on consular involvement was not settled until the end of 1910 when Fischel intervened with the Foreign Office. This resulted in the drafting of a formal protocol. Squadron Chief Günther von Krosigk responded that it was 'a considerable improvement...that the extent of the cooperation of Imperial Representatives in the War Intelligence System once again is set out, and the often observed reticence of individual gentlemen will be more easily overcome'.²⁵

The Intelligence System in Australasia

From a relatively early time the Australian colonies had consular representation from individual city states such as Hamburg and Bremen as well as the kingdoms of Prussia and Saxony. These resulted from the initiatives of local entrepreneurs promoting emigration and trade. In 1879 the establishment of a Consulate-General by the new German Empire recognised the colonies' strategic location in the Pacific, and 'manifested an important re-evaluation ...and an even more fundamental change in the assessment of Australia's importance in the Pacific region'.²⁶ German perceptions of Australia's position in the international context had changed as a result of its loud claims to regional exclusivity in the southern Pacific and what this implied for German aims in the region.

There was long term and deliberate activity by German Consular officials and mercantile agents and some German-born but naturalised settlers who were active agents of Naval Intelligence.²⁷ That this is denied by some contemporary writers is counteracted by the archival evidence. There can be little doubt that it was active well before Federation. In 1900, the Senior Officer of the Australian Station, Korvettenkapitän Hugo Emsmann, reported to Admiralty Chief of Staff Otto von Diederichs that his orders 'for the implementation of operational directives' had been carried out' and that despite the strong anti-German feeling which existed -no doubt due to Germany's recent acquisition of Samoa- 'the skill of 'Number 35' can ensure the implementation of the directives for Sydney'.²⁸ Unfortunately the agent's name is not provided.



In April 1901 his successor (Fregattenkapitän Max von Grapow) discussed 'War Case D' (Germany and Britain) with the new Consul-General, Paul von Buri.²⁹ It was decided there needed to be more meetings between Buri, the North

²⁴ RM5/v 3660, Bl.259, Ingenohl-Fischel, 9 February 1910.

²⁵ RM5/v 5973, Bl.23, Krosigk-Fischel, 2 January 1911.

²⁶ I. Veit-Brause, 'Australia as an "Object" in Nineteenth Century World Affairs-the Example of German Consular Representation in the Australian Colonies', *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, Vol.32, No.2, 1988, 153.

²⁷ Every effort was made by the Consuls to ensure retention of German nationality by settlers, and this was an important part of maintaining influence. See H. Hesse, 'Giebt es eine unmittelbare Reichsangehörigkeit?', *Beiträge zur Kolonialpolitik und Kolonialwirtschaft*, 4. Jg. 1902-3, 123-160; the international jurist Karl von Stengel, 'Die deutsche Reichsangehörigkeit vom national und internationalen Standpunkt', *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung*, 31 August 1899, 317.

²⁸ RM5/v 3662, Bl.4, Emsmann-Diederichs, 20 July 1900.

²⁹ Paul von Buri was a jurist who served in Zanzibar, Cape Town, and Basel, and with the Colonial Department before his appointment to Sydney in May 1901. In 1905 he was recalled to the Colonial Department, was later Consul-General in Shanghai and in 1914 was German Minister in Bangkok. He was highly regarded for his dedication and patriotic attitude.

German Lloyd, and the Confidants before any arrangements could be implemented.³⁰ Consideration was given to how the system would continue functioning after the inevitable closure of the consulates upon a declaration of war. In November a memorandum by Grapow concerning the implementation of measures on the Australian Station in wartime emphasised that 'very careful preparation' would be needed for sending news of mobilisation and war. With the expected monitoring of telegraph lines, no intelligence could be passed directly by the agents in Australia and New Zealand to the German colonies, which would make intermediate posts necessary. Suggested were Amboina, Macassar, Noumea, Tonga, Fiji, Tahiti, and Honolulu. None of these places had Confidants at this time, but Grapow was sure that suitable persons could be found and proposed a cruiser visit each port to make the arrangements.³¹

One of the earliest instances of the involvement of consular staff as overseers of intelligence gathering is a report from Buri to Chancellor von Bülow in 1901. The evidence suggests that Buri was acting on his own initiative at this stage, perhaps at the behest of naval officers on the Australian Station who always were concerned to gain greater knowledge of what they might have to face. This involved the acquisition of military maps from the Defence Department 'through the mediation of resident Germans who have business connections with the Ministry'. These maps dealt with existing and planned fortifications in the counties of Cumberland, North Cumberland Eastern Division, and Camden Eastern Division, around Sydney. Buri had given instructions to his agents to obtain the plans of individual fortifications, but 'With the delicate nature of this business, it is difficult to say when this will be possible...one or other of the officials concerned being recruited by my middlemen...' The material was considered important enough to be taken by Consulate Secretary Baerecke who conveniently was departing on leave, and was to be delivered personally to the Foreign Office.³² Foreign Secretary Oswald von Richthofen forwarded Buri's report to the Admiralty Staff 'with the suggestion of possible communication also to the Chief of the General Staff'. A prompt response was requested as to 'whether the procuring of maps and plans by the Consulate-General is of interest to the Admiralty Staff'.³³ The response from the Admiralty Staff was decidedly positive: Diederichs replied that as to the future acquisition of documents, opinion was that 'they probably shall be of sufficient value to justify the expense'. He also requested that Buri 'obtain the offered maps and above all copies of the plans of individual fortifications'.³⁴

Buri can be credited with putting the gathering of intelligence, in its broadest sense, on a coordinated footing in Australia. In June 1902 he reported to Diederichs that dispatch books and codeword keys for distribution to the Confidants had been collected by the Station Senior Officer. It is significant that one of these agents was located at Thursday Island, the key to control of Torres Strait and starting point for operations against Australian shipping in the 1901 Plan.³⁵ The use of local residents rather than transient Germans was preferred because the not only had better contacts in the community but were less obvious. As it was put bluntly in April 1914, where possible no spies were to be employed 'but citizens of the foreign country (traitors)'.³⁶

Navy personnel also performed useful functions. In 1905 Oberleutnant z.S. Lohmann applied for permission to travel via Australia back to Germany on the completion of his service on *SMS Tiger*. The reason he gave was that during his assigned research project in 1903, it became clear there was very little information about Australia's armed forces. At the time he had used his family connections with the NDJ to gain a 'more precise

³⁰ RM5/v 6693, Bl.1, Grapow-Diederichs, November 1901

³¹ RM5/v 6693, Bl.9, 'Denkschrift die Kriegführung Deutschlands gegen England auf die Australische Station betreffend', November 1901.

³² RM5/v 5709, Buri-Bülow, 20 September 1901.

³³ RM5/v 5709, Richthofen-Diederichs, 9 December 1901.

³⁴ Politisches Archiv im Auswärtigen Amte Berlin (PA-AA), R 19289, Diederichs-Richthofen, 28 December 1901.

³⁵ RM5/v 5899, Bl.59, Buri-Diederichs, 30 June 1902.

³⁶ 'Möglichst keine Deutsche verwenden (Spione), sondern Angehörige des fremden Landes (Landesverräter)'. RM5/v 3682, Bl.312, 'Bericht über die Besprechung zwischen der Nachrichtenabteilung des Admiralstabes und Sektion IIIb des Großen Generalstabes am 20.4.14'.

picture of Australian defence'. Now he had the opportunity to make use of these connections and personally to make observations which 'might result in some contribution to the assessment of the value of Australia in wartime'. Particularly through his family associations in Australian economic circles and their Government connections, he believed he had sources not available to the regular Reporters. In order to travel as inconspicuously as possible this would be done 'under the pretext of visiting my relatives and inspecting the facilities of the Lloyd and my brother's firm'.³⁷ Admiralty Staff marginal comments state that Lohmann's study 'Land and Naval Forces of Australia' was indeed of interest. Squadron Chief Vice-Admiral Kurt von Prittwitz anticipated a useful application of his observations and supported the proposal.³⁸

Early in 1906 the Navy Office advised the Admiralty Staff that it had received a large number of Australian Government publications from the Foreign Office 'on the assumption that various of these are of interest'. Apart from maps, there was an amount of commercial material such as Annual Reports of the Mines Department, and a report on kerosene shale deposits in New South Wales. This was repeated in subsequent years, and while the information gleaned from such publications might at first sight seem mundane, it was central to evaluating Australian production and export capabilities, keeping in mind the task of the Cruiser Squadron to interdict the export of raw materials to Britain. Combined with the information being provided by the Reporters operating within Australia and the more confidential and sensitive documents which were obtained, a sufficiently detailed overview of Australian industrial and defence facilities, progress, and preparedness was built up.³⁹ This was an essential corollary of naval operational planning and was undertaken with Teutonic thoroughness, as the voluminous folios of annotated Australian material show.

Ongoing consular involvement in the intelligence network



Richard Strelitz c1913 in the uniform of the Danish Consul-General, RAC Archives.

An unidentified typewritten archival document listing prospective agents throws light on the kind of persons required for what would be crucial preparatory functions in an immediate prewar period. In Perth, Richard Strelitz, the representative of the German-Australian Steamship Company (DADG), Consul for Denmark and Sweden, and a Lieutenant in the Fremantle Infantry was 'a very trustworthy person of considerable commercial success'.



Obtaining Strelitz' services was recommended as backup for Consul Carl (Ludwig) Ratazzi⁴⁰ in Fremantle, a crucial factor for obtaining provisions in any

³⁷ RM5/v 3662, Lohmann-Commander *Tiger*, 14 June 1905.

³⁸ RM5/v 3662, Prittwitz-Büchsel, 10 July 1905.

³⁹ RM5/v 5703, Bl.29, Scheer-Büchsel, 8 January 1906.

⁴⁰ For a biography of Ratazzi see Sebastian Boch, 'The Kaiser's spy on Queen Victoria Street', *Fremantle Studies*,

prewar stage. The connections of Strelitz Brothers as 'one of the leading firms in Perth' would be of great advantage to the Intelligence System. Adelaide was an important post due to the German settlements in the interior. Consul Carl Mücke was considered too much under the influence of his English wife to be Confidant, but one Herr Rischbieth, owner of the long established firm George Hills & Co. which also had the DADG agency (German-Australian Steamship Company) was most suitable. In Melbourne, Consul Wilhelm Adena was regarded as being useful and had a trustworthy backup in Herr Pfaff 'who is regarded as quite talented'. Adena's firm of Ostermeyer & von Rompey managed the NDL agency and was highly regarded in commercial circles; from this 'some success can be expected'. In Sydney, Dr Pupke of the DADG was also to be recruited.⁴¹



By 1909, with the political climate dominated by the 'Dreadnought-scare' and rising anti-German sentiment, Consul-General Dr Georg Irmer⁴² expressed considerable reservations about the involvement of consuls, and the Consulate-General in particular, in the Intelligence System. A particular problem was the safekeeping of Reporters' secret material on Consulate premises. Following British practice, Consuls in British Colonies lacked the privileges accorded them in other nations. Thus the Consulate-General itself was regarded as a private dwelling lacking any diplomatic immunity. Given that even in peacetime the private apartments of the Consul-General as well as the Consulate offices were 'open to any police intrusion', how much more so would this be the case in the event of a threatening war or on the outbreak of hostilities? In the antipodes the usual British niceties could not be expected:

In the large English Colonies there is almost completely independent activity...as I know the conditions and persons concerned here, it can be assumed with some certainty that these quite unscrupulous Colonial authorities will use any pretext to subject the archive of the Imperial Consulate to a thorough inspection as soon as war with Germany appears unavoidable.

Given this, he recommended to the Chancellor that the Navy provide for the timely destruction of its secret material stored with the Consulate-General. He acknowledged that this advice was easily given but more difficult to implement, as the local authorities would be much sooner and better informed of the political situation than he, being dependent on British-controlled cable. It was clear that there was no more obvious and insecure place for storing secret naval material than the safe in the Consulate-General, or in his private apartments. Any commercial office or bank safe deposit box was to be preferred, 'and any trustworthy and careful private person will be less observed and thus better serve Naval Intelligence than a Consul-General without diplomatic recognition'.⁴³

The Navy for its part also had concerns, indeed the previous year Chief of Admiralty Staff Wilhelm Büchsel wrote to Colonial Secretary Bernhard Dernburg requesting a list of consuls in the colonies who held secret naval material and reiterated the agreement which provided for their handing over instructions, codes, and other papers on receipt of telegraphic instructions. This was essential to prevent their falling into the hands of any

2014, 8: 37-46.

⁴¹ PA-AA, R 19270, 'Australien-Vertrauensmänner', undated but probably around 1910.

⁴² Georg Irmer (1853-1931) studied philosophy and history at Göttingen, Halle and Berlin before entering the Foreign Office. He was *Landeshauptmann* in the Marshall Islands 1894-8, Consul-General in Genoa from 1900 until assuming the Sydney post from December 1906 to June 1910.

⁴³ RM5/v 3662, Irmer-Bülrow, 6 August 1909.

expeditionary force against the poorly defended colonial outposts.⁴⁴ There was also the chance of disaster from sloppy procedures. Early in 1910 the Foreign Office expressed concern that due to incorrect addressing, letters for Naval Intelligence had been opened by foreign nationals working in at least one German consulate. It was not only a matter of security, but of the very connection of the Foreign Office with Naval Intelligence that caused disquiet- a connection the former wanted to avoid at all costs. A subsequent memorandum recommended the precautions to be implemented.⁴⁵ Security concerns were always high on the agenda, and in 1912 the Station Senior Officer (Korvettenkapitän Bene) reported that at the request of Consul-General Richard Killiani, he had removed all the maps held there. Killiani believed that these would be 'very compromising' if confiscated. Bene temporarily deposited the maps in a Lloyd shed at Circular Quay, but this obviously was still unsatisfactory.⁴⁶

In March 1910 the Foreign Office reiterated to the Admiralty Staff the serious reservations it had about the participation in the Intelligence System of the honorary consuls in Fremantle (Ratazzi), Adelaide (Mücke), Auckland (Seegner), and Brisbane (Hirschfeld), as these men were all British subjects. Only Hirschfeld and Ratazzi held dual nationality.⁴⁷ Some naval officials were for the withdrawal of all secret codes and papers from the consuls, starting with Mücke in Adelaide- but only insofar as war preparations would not be impaired and another suitable person could be found. The Navy was in something of a bind. While the use of these consuls was suspect on security grounds, given the 'undesirable consequences' which might eventuate from the deposition of secret material with officials who were, after all, foreign nationals, attention also was drawn to Irmer's report which 'spoke convincingly' against giving the naval commanders too much independence in their respective regions.⁴⁸ Irmer was concerned that the civil authority should retain ultimate control over whatever measures were implemented - understandable given that he would bear the brunt of any repercussions.

In 1910 the Navy compromised with the Foreign Office's wish that honorary consuls not be involved in the Intelligence System, and the Senior Officer of the Australian Station (Korvettenkapitän Otto Kranzbühler) was advised of this. It was decided to remove Mücke from his function as Reporter in March 1910.⁴⁹ However Chief of Admiralty Staff Max von Fischel was unhappy with the situation, and for the time being did not implement the release of the consuls in Fremantle, Brisbane, and Auckland, wanting more time to closely consider their use. The secret codes were to remain with the consuls in Brisbane and Auckland until a final decision on their function was reached.⁵⁰ Kranzbühler recommended that in addition to Sydney, the Reporter posts in Fremantle, Brisbane, and Auckland be maintained, the first and last on the basis of their importance as bases for British ships. Brisbane was better positioned than Sydney to inform about the dispersion of naval forces along the Queensland coast and far northern islands - one of the key operational routes for the Cruiser Squadron - especially after the establishment of radio telegraph stations which would give Australian warships the advantage of speedy access to information and directives.⁵¹

⁴⁴ BA Berlin, 10.01/6878, Bl.63, Büchsel-Dernburg, 25 January 1908.

⁴⁵ BA Berlin, 10.01/6878, Bl.74, Memorandum Schoen, 14 February 1910.

⁴⁶ RM5/v 5973, Bl.79, Bene-Heeringen, 5 April 1912.

⁴⁷ RM5/v 3662, Foreign Office-Chief of Admiralty Staff, 4 March 1910.

⁴⁸ Marginal comment, RM5/v 3662, Irmer-Bethmann Hollweg, 25 November 1909.

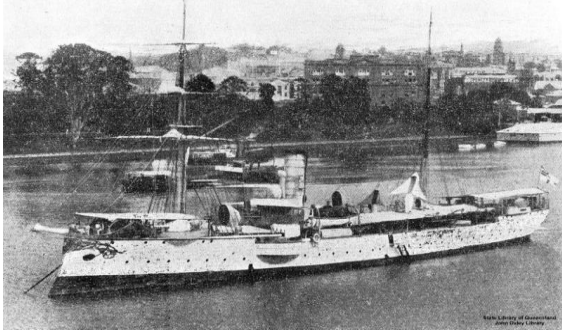
⁴⁹ RM5/v 3662, Bl.65, Fischel-Kranzbühler, March 1910.

⁵⁰ RM5/v 3662, Bl.62, draft to Foreign Office, 19 March 1910; Bl.97, Draft Memo. 2 January 1912.

⁵¹ RM5/v 3662, Bl.48, Kranzbühler-Fischel, 14 June 1910.



Consul Eugen Hirschfeld, Brisbane.



SMS Cormoran, Botanic Gardens, Brisbane c. 1909.

Cormoran was well known in Brisbane where she had regular refits. Hirschfeld also facilitated visits by the officers to German communities in the hinterland (such as Marburg, Minden and surrounding areas) to create enthusiasm for patriotic Deutschtum.

To enhance security measures, it was decided to place all the secret material held in the Consulate-General in a bank safe deposit box. Moreover, it also would be assessed if Irmer's formal services as Chief Reporter could be completely dispensed with so that he could appear as a private person in the event of any questioning by British authorities, although his continued involvement in intelligence gathering was considered 'indispensable'. Over a period of seven years he had rendered great service to warship commanders and 'had assisted the development of the Navy's war preparations in a singular manner'.⁵²

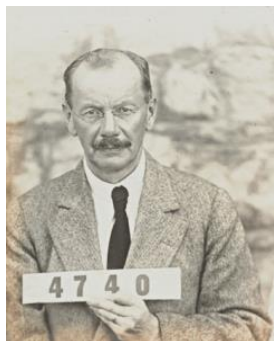
That there was ongoing participation by Australian-born or naturalised persons in German service is shown in an advice at the end of 1910 from Squadron Chief Erich Gühler informing the Admiralty Staff that concerning the extension of intelligence gathering on the Australian Station, 'the occupants of posts in Brisbane, Sydney, Fremantle and Auckland were found satisfactory, although the recruitment of reliable German nationals is preferred'.⁵³ The situation in which Mücke in Adelaide operated provided a particular problem, as he was a British subject and member of the South Australian upper house of Parliament. The press had raised the question of the position of a consul of British nationality in the event of war with the country he represented. This problem was compounded by the fact that he was in possession of numerous secret papers -including crucial codes- in his function as Reporter-Confidant. Irmer advised the Chancellor that providing Mücke with Naval Intelligence material 'contains within it the great danger that...this material can fall into undesirable hands before I can intervene'.⁵⁴ The commander of *Planet* (Reichhardt) commented in 1913 that conditions in Adelaide were 'quite unsatisfactory' and in his opinion, not only was Mücke no longer up to the demands of the job, but 'lacks the moral strength to present his German-ness with any emphasis'.⁵⁵

⁵² RM5/v 3662, Bl.62, op.cit.

⁵³ RM5/v 3660, Gühler-Fischel, 9 December 1910.

⁵⁴ RM5/v 3662, Irmer-Bethmann Hollweg, 25 November 1909.

⁵⁵ RM5/v 6001, Bl.232, Reichhardt-Kaiser, 25 June 1913.



Walter de Haas interned at Liverpool

From the time the Consul-General ceased to act as Chief Reporter in 1910 this position was filled by Walter de Haas, a crucial and somewhat shadowy figure who operated until the outbreak of the War. Initially he was manager of the goods department of Weber, Lohmann & Co. in Sydney before being appointed Commercial Attaché on 1 March 1903 on Irmer's direct recommendation. He had extensive commercial contacts throughout Australia, and was considered unobtrusive and judicious. As 'Number 627' with the codenames 'Sylvester' and 'Sydow' he coordinated Reporter-Confidants Oscar Plate (Number 640), manager of the NDL office, and Otto Bauer (Number 641).⁵⁶ De Haas' energetic activities soon attracted the attention of the authorities. In 1911 the Officer Commanding on Thursday Island, Major Cox-Taylor, advised that de Haas had arrived ostensibly to enquire into pearl fishing, 'but this is believed to be a blind, real object attack and defence'. Cox-Taylor was instructed to keep him under day and night surveillance.⁵⁷ De Haas continued on to Darwin where the surveillance continued. He was described as displaying more than a passing interest in the railway, 'mentally notes trifling matters as he moves about' and in the course of conversation asked directions to the cable company's station.⁵⁸

The appendix to Kranzbühler's report on the intelligence situation contains the documentation of de Haas' induction as Chief Reporter for the Australian Station. The final clause is particularly significant as it makes clear why there was no evidence of his activity-or of activity by any other Reporter or Confidant-so eagerly searched for by Australian intelligence officers, and which has been used by some historians as the basis to whitewash him and the consuls: 'On the outbreak of war with England the complete secret materials including all related papers of any kind are to be destroyed, and activity as Chief Reporter will cease'.⁵⁹ There was a clear intention not to endanger any of the operating personnel. A 1913 directive from the Admiralty Staff stated that any activity which would be punished as treason could not be demanded of a Confidant. Since the Reporters were to destroy all their secret papers immediately at the onset of hostilities, this meant that they no longer were in a position to communicate with the Navy. Should the secret codes be retained and fall into enemy hands, the whole Intelligence System in Asia would be exposed.⁶⁰ It was a difficult situation. In June 1912 Chief of Admiralty Staff August von Heeringen complained that given the broad expanse of the Australian Station, intelligence gathering facilities were quite unfavourable. The Senior Officer would have to use all available means in order to receive news of war promptly. He recommended the outfitting of the Station's warships with radio. Indeed the extension of the radio network in the Pacific was an urgent necessity, essential for achieving the effective operation of the Intelligence System.⁶¹

⁵⁶ RM5/v 3662, Kranzbühler-Ingenohl, 14 June 1910.

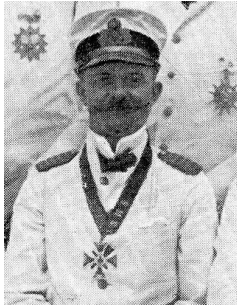
⁵⁷ Australian Archives (Melbourne), MP84/1877/4/7, Dept of Defence-Secretary Dept of External Affairs, 12 September 1911.

⁵⁸ Ibid., S.J. Mitchell-Minister for External Affairs, 28 September 1911.

⁵⁹ RM5/v 3662, 'Verhandlung über die Verpflichtung des Herrn Walter de Haas als Hauptberichterstatter der Australischen Station', 1910.

⁶⁰ RM5/v 5900, Heeringen-Mommsen, 17 February 1913.

⁶¹ RM5/v 5900, Heeringen-Station Senior Officer, 28 June 1912.



In October 1912 the Australian Station Senior Officer (Korvettenkapitän Paul Ebert, *Cormoran*), in a tilt at the reduced rôle of the consuls under Foreign Office influence, expressed concern that due to the continual unfavourable intelligence conditions on the Station, for the foreseeable future 'this exceptional state of affairs will remain the rule and affect the Pacific cruisers'. Even if the installation of radio had provided a considerable improvement, the experience of the Squadron confirmed its short range under Pacific meteorological conditions. As the involvement of the Consul-General was to be kept to a minimum, de Haas in Sydney had the crucial job of setting the system in motion. The Consul-General still would be kept fully informed. Indeed he was the only person who knew the whereabouts of the warships. De Haas as Chief Reporter would be instructed by the Admiralty Staff or Station Senior Officer by coded telegram reading 'Mobilise Confidant System' and accordingly would instruct Plate and Bauer to proceed with loading of the support vessels with coal and provisions. It was crucial to ensure their departure before they could be held in port, as supplies for the Pacific cruisers would be limited. Ebert emphasised that

...without any doubt Australia can be regarded as an enemy in War Case C [Britain]. But at the same time...the obtaining of auxiliary cruisers by the Reporter/Confidant in Sydney must be planned...as the ship matériel without exception will be required by the Cruiser Squadron.⁶²

Early in 1913, in consultation with Consul-General Richard Kiliani, some adjustments were made to the system. It was clarified that in principle it was the function of the Station Senior Officer to set the Confidants on a war footing. Only in exceptional cases would there be a direct order from the Admiralty Staff to the individual Confidant.⁶³ The Admiralty Staff would have direct communication with individual Confidants or Reporters if their assigned naval commanders were at sea, unable to be reached by cable or radio, and war was imminent.⁶⁴

To reinforce preparedness, in March Ebert conducted an assessment of the state of secret papers and reviewed the functions of de Haas, Plate, and Bauer. All was found to be in order. Some alterations to the codes were advised, de Haas was provided with details on the radio stations in the Pacific, and secret papers removed were stored on board *Cormoran*. Kiliani took the opportunity to express to Ebert his doubts as to whether de Haas would remain for much longer as Chief Reporter, since as the Commercial Attaché he was an official of the Foreign Office.⁶⁵ Kiliani probably was thinking of the problems that the Foreign Office's directive had caused with the Consuls, problems which could well be done without, given de Haas' crucial function.

The rôle of the consuls in operational planning

Both the consular reports and the regular military-political reports written by the Squadron's commanders indicate the importance placed on maintaining good communication and if possible affable personal contacts, between German diplomatic staff and the incumbents of Vice-Regal offices, and with naval and military personnel in Australia and New Zealand. However the consuls had more than a cosmetic diplomatic function as we have already seen. A commentary on the 'Procedures for the Australian Station for the Operational Orders of the Cruiser Squadron and H.M. Ships Overseas' in

⁶² RM5/v 5900, Ebert-Heeringen, 14 October 1912.

⁶³ RM5/v 3662, Bl.136, Draft Admiralty Staff-Station Senior Officer, 8 Februar 1913.

⁶⁴ RM5/v 5900, Heeringen, 'Rundschreiben', encl. Heeringen-Mommsen, 28 June 1912.

⁶⁵ RM5/v 3662, [Ebert]-Heeringen, 14 March 1913

February 1900 emphasised the consuls' important function in ensuring the successful implementation of immediate prewar measures, and the smooth running of the Intelligence System.

As Chief Reporter (*Hauptberichterstatter*) until 1910, the Sydney Consul-General was responsible for advising the Station cruisers of impending or actual war. As early as 1901 this post and the other consulates were to provide the Squadron Chief via Shanghai with all intelligence useful for the prosecution of war in the Pacific. Each consulate had been provided with detailed instructions on this. Sydney also had to notify the Lloyd Agency of the requisition of its vessels and authorise the loading of coal and matériel. There were always at least two Lloyd postal steamers at Adelaide, Melbourne, and Sydney. In the 1900 Directives, these, designated Steamer B and Steamer H, were assigned to bring news of war to the cruisers on the Australian Station. 'B' then would act as support vessel for the cruiser in the east of the Station (then *Cormoran*), and 'H' for the cruiser in the west of the Station (then *Seeadler*). All the Lloyd steamers in Australia could average 11 knots or more. Particularly if the United States were hostile, speedy advice to any cruisers at Apia in German Samoa was essential. News of tension or war also would be sent by cable to Apia and Herbertshöhe, advising when the support vessels should arrive. The sealed orders for the captains of the requisitioned vessels were held in the safe at the Consulate-General and passed directly hand-to-hand. This was to be done by the Confidant personally, perhaps requiring a rail journey to Melbourne or another port. The Consul-General also had to keep the Lloyd Agency up to date on outfitting and loading requirements.⁶⁶

Sydney was given considerable flexibility of action by Berlin, unavoidable in the remote circumstances he had to operate. According to the political situation and in the absence of any communication, it was left to the Consul-general's discretion whether before war was declared he contacted the Chief of Admiralty Staff or Chief of the Cruiser Squadron for any specific instructions or proceeded as he best decided.⁶⁷

Arrangements for Batavia made in late 1902 by Squadron Chief Richard von Geissler specified the Consul-General's main task to act as Chief Reporter for the Intelligence System. Closer oversight was exercised here than elsewhere because of Batavia's crucial supply function. With mobilisation or war, a Staff Officer would be dispatched from the Squadron Command in the guise of a businessman to assume the post of Chief Reporter and coordinate preparations. The most important task was obtaining auxiliaries and supply vessels, and supervising their loading of coal and provisions for the cruisers of the Squadron main body. The warships of the Australian and East African Stations, if rejoined with the Squadron, also would need their requirements supplied from Batavia.⁶⁸



In 1905, Squadron Chief Kurt von Prittwitz und Gaffron arranged that as the designated Zone Officer, a naval officer detached from the Squadron, had first to get to Batavia in a period of tension, the Consul-General would temporarily assume his responsibilities. While the Foreign Office was not happy about this, the arrangement was most suitable for the Navy as the Consul-General's influence guaranteed proper implementation. The job was also crucial because of the responsibility for contacting

⁶⁶ RM5/v 6693, Bl.5, 'Ausführungbestimmungen für die Australische Station zu den Operationsbefehlen für das Kreuzergeschwader und S.M. Schiffe im Auslande vom 1.2.1900', November 1901, original in RM5/v 5899, Bl.9, 20 June 1900.

⁶⁷ RM5/v 6696, *ibid.*

⁶⁸ RM5/v 5968, Bl.54, Geissler, 'Abmachung mit dem General-Konsul in Batavia', 17 October 1902.

warships on the Australian Station after Sydney ceased operation.⁶⁹ Because of this, the following year procedures were tightened, the Consul-General now acting as soon as it appeared certain that Sydney would be unable to despatch vessels. To facilitate this the Senior Officer on the Australian Station would keep the Consul-General regularly informed of warship movements.⁷⁰ The latter now had enormous responsibilities covering a range of activities from coordinating intelligence to despatching supply vessels. It was a massive logistical undertaking, to be performed secretly despite the monitoring of Dutch authorities.

The Consul-General in Sydney also exercised broad supervisory functions. Of prime importance was to ensure the requisitioning two NDL steamers which were to bring confirmation of war and supplies to the warships on the Australian Station. The letter from the Consul-General to the NDL Agency outlined the procedure to be followed, and stressed the need for speed and secrecy. This depended to a large degree on the skill and alacrity of the Agency and steamer captains in obtaining the specified supplies without arousing suspicion, and departing port before any intervention. All steps had to be put in motion before the Consulate-General was closed down, something taken for granted on the part of the Australian authorities. If the Consul-General was unable to perform any of the tasks, the entire responsibility would devolve onto the Confidants. A review of instructions in 1905 emphasised the importance of obtaining information about the movements and intentions of Australian warships.⁷¹

At the beginning of 1908, Squadron Chief Carl Coerper reported to the Admiralty Staff on his attempts to have all Consuls-General supply British warship movements in coded cable messages. In a period of tension this would extend to merchant vessels, especially those which could be converted to auxiliary cruisers, and those which had coal or exports which would be likely contraband of war.⁷² Later in the year the 'General Zone Instructions' emphasised that all possible support was expected to be given by Consuls. In this way the implementation of all necessary measures for supplying the Squadron would be ensured.⁷³

General security considerations apart, the consuls' activities made their position quite precarious. The Singapore Consulate-General was important for the Squadron, despite its exposed position and anticipated closure in a war with Britain. In February 1910, Squadron Chief Friedrich von Ingenohl wrote to Admiralty Chief of Staff Max von Fischel that following confidential talks with Consul-General Richard Kiliani and the Reporter/Confidants, there were doubts about the British position on the extra-territorial status of consular personnel. Kiliani was well aware of the far reaching effect of the loss of secret papers dealing with intelligence matters, and particularly those concerning operational details. He was convinced that the British would raid his offices well before the outbreak of any conflict. The Navy was in a difficult position here. The existing situation could result in a real problem, as during the designated period of 'Threatening War', Singapore would have decisive importance for the material support of the Cruiser Squadron. This included the dispatch of auxiliary and supply vessels using the Asian network of business connections of Behn, Meyer & Co., and the 'decisive personality' of the key Reporter/Confidant within this firm, who would remain in Singapore until the last moment. The Squadron's large coal requirements could only be obtained unobtrusively if he remained in Singapore. On these grounds, Ingenohl did not see how the detailed instructions and other secret papers could be removed from the Singapore Consulate-General:

It is in the interests of the successful activity of Reporter (Confidant) 5361 to leave him the entire secret material. [He] repeatedly stated that the quick

⁶⁹ RM5/v 5970, Prittwitz-Kaiser, 29 October 1905.

⁷⁰ RM5/v 5899, Bl.123, Breusing-Senior Officer Australian Station, 10 January 1906.

⁷¹ RM5/v 6693, 'Vorarbeiten...' September 1904; RM5/v 5899, Bl.140, 'Operationen der Kriegsschiffe der Australischen Station', Senior Officer Australian Station-Consul General Sydney, October 1905.

⁷² RM5/v 5971, Bl.141, Coerper-Büchsel, 15 January 1908.

⁷³ RM5/v 6680, Bl.11, 'Allgemeine Etappen-Instruktionen', 26 October 1908.

settlement of the deals necessary for obtaining coal would only be possible if all details were specified...

Yet if incriminating material were taken from the Consular offices and Kiliani's involvement in Naval Intelligence became known to the British, this would have serious implications for the Squadron's operational effectiveness. To improve security Kiliani suggested he relinquish responsibility for the material as soon as conditions made it appear necessary. As the British were unaware of the Reporter/Confidants' identities, this appeared an acceptable alternative. Behn, Meyer & Co. had 30 safes, some located in the manager's private quarters. Nevertheless, the Chief Reporter/Confidant was ordered that if there were the slightest hint of exposure, he was to destroy all papers immediately. After he then left Singapore, duplicate copies of all material could be obtained from the Consul-General in Manila.⁷⁴ Either way the Squadron's supply would continue without disruption.

Ingenohl noted the extraordinary lengths to which Kiliani had gone to cooperate with the Navy and this highlighted his great value for naval operational planning. Kiliani provided a 'shining example' for other British posts where German consuls were located. He also paid a price. 'For some time he had been under suspicion by the British, which made it virtually impossible to obtain useful information from official sources. This mistrust could have arisen only from recognition of his connection with naval authorities, especially the Cruiser Squadron, and from his telegraphic dispatches (defensive marginal note: 'Not with the Admiralty Staff!) from which the British had drawn 'all manner of conclusions'. His position would be strengthened by the Admiralty Staff avoiding use of any recognisable marking or wording in communication with him. Ingenohl suggested that all Admiralty Staff communication with Consuls in British ports in Asia, when not through personal delivery by steamer captains, be diverted through the Squadron Command. A similar arrangement was also strongly advised for Consuls in other nations. He also strongly supported Kiliani's request to be permitted to use the Naval Code for his telegraphic communication, and stressed that any diminution of his function would be to the detriment of the Squadron.⁷⁵

The Anglo-Australian response.

British naval intelligence abroad formally began in October 1893 with one officer being appointed to the flagship of the Mediterranean Station, primarily with the object of protecting merchant trade in wartime. In November 1900 a similar appointment was made on the China Station. The need for shore-based intelligence centres became apparent as the system of reporting evolved. Centres were established in Colombo, Singapore, and Hong Kong in 1904; in Cape Town, Fremantle (lent to the Australian Government), Sydney, St Vincent, Pernambuco, and Montevideo in 1911; and Shanghai in 1913.

Previous to this, consuls or other colonial officials had sent despatches about shipping movements directly to the Commanders-in-Chief or Senior Naval Officers of the various Stations. This was found to be inefficient, as telegrams took days or even weeks to arrive when warships were at sea. A greater impetus for the system was the objection of some foreign governments to British officials sending coded telegrams to naval ships, and it was hinted that their recall would be requested. Until 1914, intelligence officers were primarily concerned with reporting the positions and movements of foreign warships, details of activity on trade routes, studies of probable enemy shipping, and the handling of messages to and from Station commanders.⁷⁶ From the beginning of 1912, Australian naval interests were represented in London by Captain Francis Haworth-Booth, attached to the staff of the High Commission, and whose function was to advise the High Commissioner in Admiralty matters. He had been Assistant Director of Naval Intelligence

⁷⁴ RM5/v 3680, B1.42, Ingenohl-Fischel, 5 February 1910.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ AA Melbourne, MP1587/189D, NID 10388/21, 'Naval Intelligence Organisation-Abroad'.

1905-6, and between 1908-10 was commander of the cruiser *Brilliant*. His abilities were commented on by Kiliani.⁷⁷

Responding to an Australian Government suggestion of direct exchange of intelligence between the Naval Intelligence Officer China and the Director of Intelligence Melbourne, Colonial Secretary Lewis Harcourt replied in March 1912 that while the Admiralty would not approve this, it was prepared to direct the Commander-in-Chief of the China Station to forward such intelligence as was reported to him, provided that the Australian Government gave an assurance that everything supplied would be treated in strict confidentiality and that in no circumstances was any portion of it be communicated to the press.⁷⁸ The Commonwealth assumed control of the intelligence centres at Sydney and Fremantle from 1 July 1914. It was emphasised that existing arrangements for the Australians to work in conjunction with the British Officers at Hong Kong, Singapore, Colombo, and Cape Town would continue, to keep them informed of all movements of foreign vessels.⁷⁹

At the outbreak of the War, the Naval Board in Melbourne was given control of the censorship of all radio and cable communication in and out of Australia, and Australia contributed to early British success.⁸⁰ The Germans were unlucky from the very start. The codebreakers at the Admiralty received from the Russians the key that unlocked the German Naval Code, a codebook recovered from the light cruiser *Magdeburg* on 26 August. With this and the Trade Communications Book found on an interned merchant vessel in Melbourne, virtually any German message could be read.⁸¹

Understandably with the commencement of hostilities there were grave fears in both the general population and the military as to the possibility of spying and sabotage. The internment of Germans and Australians of German descent was undertaken under the supervision of the Intelligence Section of the General Staff. The irrational popular hysteria, for which the press bears a high degree of responsibility, has been adequately documented, although the extent and necessity of internments is still a subject of debate, with some historians vehemently denying the activity of some local Germans clearly involved with intelligence gathering.⁸² In the case of Eugen Hirschfeld in Brisbane, the assessment of the Intelligence Section of the General Staff was that 'a German could, and in many cases did, retain his German nationality though naturalized, that information which would be of use in an invasion was on the Consular files, and that there was evidence to be adduced from the files of an intended invasion of Australia'.⁸³ Given that the Consuls' status involved official recognition by the German Government -and apart from the simple fact that they all were active in the Naval Intelligence System- they were regarded as the political leaders of the German community. On this basis Hirschfeld, Ratazzi (Perth), Adena (Melbourne), Dehle (Hobart), and Johansen (Newcastle) were interned.

⁷⁷ RM5/v 5704, Bl.227, Kiliani-Bethmann Hollweg, forwarded to Admiralty Staff 6 February 1912.

⁷⁸ AA Melbourne, MP81/1, 2021/1/3, Harcourt-Denman, 15 March 1912.

⁷⁹ AA Melbourne, MP1049/1914/0293, Admiralty -Colonial Under-Secretary of State, 19 May 1914.

⁸⁰ See AA Melbourne, MP1049/1918/0250; F. Cain, *The Origins of Political Surveillance in Australia* (London/Sydney:Angus & Robertson, 1983), 77.

⁸¹ See Knightley, 45.

⁸² See R. Evans, *Loyalty and Disloyalty: Social Conflict on the Queensland Homefront, 1914-18* (Sydney:Allen & Unwin, 1987).

⁸³ AA Melbourne, MP367567/3/4740, Defence Dept Minute paper, Intelligence Section General Staff-Secretary, Defence Dept, 22 February 1919.



Eugen Hirschfeld's case is particularly interesting, not least because of his enigmatic character. In historical assessments he has been successfully 'victim-whitewashed' but the German archives clearly show his intimate involvement with the naval intelligence system. Apart from his intelligence activities, he was an organiser for the German Navy League, which raised money in Australia for promoting the naval construction program in Germany -primarily Naval Secretary Alfred Tirpitz' *Dreadnought* class battleship program to confront Britain. In 1913 members also were listed in New South Wales, Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia, and New Zealand, and included Consuls Dehle in Hobart and Ratazzi in Fremantle.⁸⁴ The umbrella organisation German Navy League Abroad was founded in 1898 with the assistance of the Colonial Society for 'the ideological mobilisation of Germans residing in the colonies and foreign countries'. It raised enough money to pay for the gunboat *Vaterland* which commenced service on the Yangtse in 1904.⁸⁵ Major Serle of the Department of Military Intelligence in Brisbane wrote in 1920 that 'Hirschfeld claimed when first interned privileges as a Colonel in the German Army'.⁸⁶ The Defence Department advised the Prime Minister that 'there is evidence that he considered himself as an enemy subject and was recognised by the German Government as a German'.⁸⁷ In fact, while a member of the Queensland Legislative Council, he 'secretly renounced his British Naturalisation and his Queensland State Naturalisation and naturalised himself, wife and family as German Subjects through the Imperial Chancellor, Berlin'.⁸⁸ Hirschfeld was interned in 1916 and deported in 1920. Having successfully concealed his pre-War activities he was able to rehabilitate himself and returned in 1927. At his death in 1946 he was 'a highly respected citizen of his adopted country'.⁸⁹

Similar stories surround other figures. In 1913 the commander of *Planet* praised Consul Adena as 'a very respected and influential personality, extraordinarily concerned with the preservation of *Deutschum*'.⁹⁰ Mücke, perhaps the most naive of the Consuls, was interned briefly at Fort Largs in April 1916, and later confined to his own home as his youngest son was serving with the AIF. Consul General Richard Kiliani, formerly in Singapore where his contribution to the Intelligence System brought frequent praise from the Navy, held that post in Sydney until the outbreak of war and was in Ernest Scott's words 'a genial, sociable, and well-informed man' who had many Australian friends in government, commercial, and social circles.⁹¹ These contacts assisted him considerably in his intelligence tasks. The evidence of the activities of Walter de Haas and Oscar

⁸⁴ RM5/v 9921, Bl.197, 'Jahresbericht des hauptverbandes Deutscher Flottenvereine im Auslande, 1902'; RM5/v 9923, Bl. 331, 'Jahresbericht...1913'.

⁸⁵ R. Pierard, 'The German Colonial Society' in Knoll & Gann, 32.

⁸⁶ AA-Melbourne, MP367/10, 567/3/4740, Serle-Defence Dept, 29 June 1920.

⁸⁷ AA-Melbourne, C.567/3/4176, Defence Dept-Prime Minister, 19 February 1920.

⁸⁸ AA-Brisbane, CA1219, BP4/1, Correspondence Files 1914-22, Report of Capt A. Wakkace, Intelligence Section, 30 march 1920.

⁸⁹ Johannes Voigt, Ed. *New Beginnings. The Germans in New South Wales and Queensland* (Stuttgart:Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations, 1983), 130-8; see also Gerhard Fischer's comments in *Enemy Aliens. Internment and the Homefront Experience in Australia 1914-1920* (Brisbane:University of Queensland Press, 1989), 42.

⁹⁰ RM5/v 6001, Bl.232, Reichhardt-Kaiser, 25 June 1913. Particular praise was accorded to Adena for securing the presence of the Prime Minister at the 25th anniversary celebration of the Kaiser's accession.

⁹¹ Scott, 140.

Plate, who have been exonerated by historians on the basis of lack of evidence in Australian archives, lies in the German files. In 1913 de Haas was recalled for unspecified duties in the Foreign Office, and returned to Sydney in January 1914. His arrest in November 1915 was related to suspicions of his part in German Intelligence and in particular of an early warning to the German commercial community of the outbreak of war. He was interned in the Trial Bay Camp and in 1916 the German Foreign Office specifically requested his release. He did not leave Australia until 1919, and was promoted to *Ministerialdirektor* in the Foreign Office in 1926. He had at least one child born in Australia. Plate obviously had been very careful to conceal his activities as he was permitted to continue living at home for some months. This irked numerous people 'in the know', including Creswell who wrote a Minute Paper in which he stated that Plate's permission to keep open the Lloyd office

only makes it possible for him both to get without difficulty any knowledge he may care for about the movements of our transports...and to send friends in the Dutch East Indies information as to the best time to fit out and despatch any of the numerous German merchant vessels which have taken refuge there.⁹²

Discovering names of Intelligence agents in Australia has been a difficult and time-consuming task given the purely chronological ordering of the German files. Given also that names survive. The 'Abteilung IIIb' of the Army General Staff which was responsible for intelligence and sabotage projects destroyed its files at the end of the War to keep them from falling into revolutionary hands. The same fate may well have befallen Naval Intelligence files.

The Anglo-Australian intelligence system might have been incomplete and certainly was not as well organised as its German counterpart, but as a postwar report observed, it was no exaggeration to say that the protection afforded to British shipping by routing and advice, and the captures of enemy shipping, 'repaid the country a hundredfold for any expenditure...It is only to be deplored that greater results could not be obtained owing to the organisation being a skeleton one and understaffed.' It was asserted that failure to establish an intelligence post on the west coast of South America in peacetime had a direct bearing on Admiral Cradock's disaster at Coronel at the hands of the Cruiser Squadron under Graf Spee.⁹³

Ernest Scott wrote in the official war history that no enemy had anyone in their pay within Australia to act as spies.⁹⁴ Differentiating between 'agents' and 'spies' may be considered splitting hairs. For Scott, anyone asking the question as to whether there were any German 'spies' in Australia will, under the strict definition of 'a person employed in time of war to obtain secret information regarding the enemy' receive a negative answer. However, as Richard Morton aptly commented, '...the latter reduction of this argument, not by Scott but by modern writers, to the conclusion that because no spies were discovered, there were no spies...rests on even more shaky logic'.⁹⁵

⁹² AA-Melbourne, MP367, 567/3/4138, 'Suggested internment of certain Germans now at large in Sydney', 7 October 1915.

⁹³ AA-Melbourne, MP1587/189D, NID 10388/21, 'Naval Intelligence Organisation'.

⁹⁴ Scott, 142.

⁹⁵ R.J. Morton, 'The enemy within the gates: the internment of Australian citizens during the Great War', Ph.D. Thesis, La Trobe University, Melbourne, 1990, 4.

Appendix

NAVAL INTELLIGENCE REPORTERS AND CONFIDANTS

Sydney

Walter de Haas, Commercial Attaché in Consulate-General, Chief Reporter from 1910. (Number 627)

Oscar Plate of Lohmann & Co. agents for North German Lloyd. (Number 640)

Otto Bauer of Rabone, Feez & Co. (Number 6401)

Melbourne

Consul Wilhelm Adena

Brisbane

Consul Eugen Hirschfeld (Number 631). Relieved November 1911 but retained Naval Code.

Adelaide

Consul Carl Mücke, relieved July 1910.

(Mücke was considered a security risk because of his British wife).

Fremantle

Consul Carl Ludwig Ratazzi. Relieved November 1911.

Auckland

Consul Carl Seegner (Seegner & Co.) Number 630. Relieved November 1911 but retained Naval Code.

New Guinea

Governor, or representative c/o the firm Emil Timm, Matupi.

Dr A. Osswald, Rabaul, succeeded in September 1913 by Dr Paul Lederer.

Ernst Berghausen, Friedrich-Wilhelmshafen

Angaur (Palau Islands)

Wilhelm Schönian, manager of German Pacific Phosphate Co. Succeeded in 1910 by H. Rodatz.

Apia

Adolf Schlettwein, Second Regional Administrator (*Bezirksamtsmann*)

Jaluit

Dr Born (Government doctor).

Ponape

Dr Girschner (Government doctor).

Yap

Reg.-Rat Dr Kersting, First Regional Administrator (to1910)

Intendantursekretär Baumert (1910)

Günther Gretus, manager of cable station and agent of German Pacific Radio Telegraphy Co.

Amoy

Auckland

Bangkok

Batavia

Bombay

Canton

Chifu

Colombo

Hainan

Hong Kong	Penang	Swatau
Kobe	Saigon	Tientsin
Manila	Sandakan	Vladivostok
Menado	San Francisco	Valparaiso
Nagasaki	Shanghai	Yokohama
Pakhoi	Soerabaja	

This list is compiled from various despatches and is incomplete for the regions, particularly the Pacific ports of North and South America. German archives have (to date) revealed no single list.

CONSULS

Sydney

1901	<i>Gerichts-Assessor</i> Grunow, Vice-Consul & Acting Consul-General.
1902-6	<i>Wirk. Legations-Rat</i> Paul von Buri, Consul-General.
1907-11	Dr Georg Irmer, Consul-General.
1912-14	Richard Kiliani, Consul-General.

Vice-Consuls

1903-6	Wilhelm Münzenthaler
1907-10	Karl Graf Deym von Stritez
1911-12	Otto Bünz
1913-14	- Klewitz; <i>Gerichtsreferendar</i> von Kamphövener as 'Attaché'

Melbourne

1902	W. A. Brahe
1910-11	J. Amschel (Vice-Consul)
1912-	Wilhelm F. C. Adena

Brisbane

1901	Wilhelm von Plönnies
1907-11	Eugen Hirschfeld

Adelaide

1901-	H. Carl Mücke
1912	Dr Marcel von Lukowicz, Vice-Consul.

Fremantle

1901	vacant
1906-	Carl Ludwig Ratazzi

Hobart

1901	Dr Edgar Wolfhagen
1910-	Alfred Dehle

Source: *Handbuch für das Deutsche Reich. Bearbeitet im Reichsamt des Innern, 1901-14.*