

## Initial Effects of the Outbreak of War 100 years ago

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With the Centenary of the start of World War I so imminent it is timely to reflect on some of the immediate effects of the declaration.

In the first few days of August 1914 there were seven German vessels in Port Jackson, one moored at Circular Quay was the 7.964 ton mail steamer *Seydlitz* (of Bremen, Germany)<sup>1</sup> (Figure 1). It had departed Bremen on 3 June 1914 and called in at Antwerp, Southampton, Algiers, Genoa, Naples, Port Said, Suez, Aden, Colombo, Fremantle, Adelaide, Melbourne<sup>2</sup> to arrive in Sydney on 25 July 1914<sup>3</sup>. There, 175 immigrants were discharged of which “Italians and Greeks predominated” and the majority were “wives and families of those from the continent, who came to Australia some time ago”. However, one passenger was the commercial traveller Ferruccio Castoldi who was returning to his wife and three-year-old son Victor. In later life Victor was styled as Victor Coleman and worked as a draughtsman for the Blue Mountains City Council for whom he produced some of the better maps of the Blue Mountains.



Figure 1. Postcard of the Norddeutscher Lloyd passenger and mail Steamer *Seydlitz*<sup>3A</sup>.

The *Seydlitz* was due to depart from Sydney on 5 August<sup>4</sup> but the Captain had prior warning that the declaration of war between Britain and Germany was about to occur. With just five hours notice he “put to sea in a hurry” at 1.00 p.m. on 3 August<sup>5</sup> to avoid detention by the Commonwealth authorities. So rapid was the departure that the ship left ‘shorthanded’ as some of the crew who were ashore at the time<sup>6</sup>. The warning was correct for Britain declared war with Germany on 5 August 1914<sup>7</sup> and that involved all of parts of the Empire including Australia. Despite numerous false reports of the *Seydlitz* being captured, it was later found to have reached the neutral port of Valparaiso, Chile<sup>8</sup> after travelling “at top speed with lights out” having made a record crossing of the Pacific Ocean in 20 days<sup>9</sup>. A most timely escape from Sydney. Stranded crew members, and those on captured ships, soon experienced difficulties because their pay was abruptly terminated<sup>10</sup>. Many of these merchant seamen were refused employment, or Australians refused to work with them<sup>11</sup>, so some took to larceny to gain money for food<sup>12</sup>. Colonists of German extract were quick to declare loyalty to Australia (and hence to Britain) and in August 1914 many meetings were organised for that purpose, notably in places like the Barossa Valley<sup>13</sup>. There was a rush to obtain naturalisation which brought forth a legal problem in relation to the status of a hastily naturalised individual who subsequently committed acts deemed to be treason<sup>14</sup>. Some hostility towards Germans was shown by hooligans, especially in the ‘riot’ that took place in Melbourne<sup>15</sup>, whereas many Australians urged tolerance<sup>16</sup>. In the

first month of WWI Germans residing in Australia were merely required to register at the nearest Police Station and notify the Police of subsequent address changes, but German reservists were arrested<sup>17</sup>. Internment of selected Germans came later<sup>18</sup> and by May 1915 the Germans not interned had to report to the Police once a week<sup>19</sup>.

Businesses run by people with German-sounding names were sometimes ostracised leading to financial hardships and their owners ridiculed<sup>20</sup> and fearful of attack. Banks were not allowed to transfer funds to any German territory and credit could not be granted to aliens; but Germans could pay bills from their existing accounts<sup>21</sup>. Trade with Germany ceased and thus many goods had to be sourced elsewhere, alternatives sometimes being made locally; in addition Australia had to supply greater quantities of food and other items to Britain<sup>22</sup>.

Australia took the opportunity to quickly seize New Guinea and many islands such as Bougainville that were formerly included in Kaiser Wilhelms Land<sup>23</sup>. This was thought to be advantageous in terms of assets but it also brought added responsibilities that were not immediately recognised!



Figure 2. Advertisement - *The Blue Mountain Echo*, 7 August 1914, p.1.

The Katoomba firm of Mullany & Co. was opportunistic in using the event as an excuse to announce a sale in the first issue of *The Blue Mountain Echo* after the declaration of War<sup>24</sup> (Figure 2). But in August 1914 that newspaper mostly was full of the usual Mountains announcements and gossip of the time although it did contain some articles about the war of a general nature. Residents of Lawson, like those in some other villages, quickly organised fund raising events and Katoomba established a 'Patriotic Fund'; the Leura group seemingly had the intention of purchasing 'comforts for the troops' or giving support to those families deprived of the bread-winner who had enlisted<sup>26</sup>. However the Blackheathens chose "to commence preparing garments" so the ladies took to sewing and knitting!

Harry Phillips produced his famous book "The Cloud" (Figure 3), based around a poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley, in time to catch the visitors to the Blue Mountains at Christmas 1914. It contains photographs taken by Phillips of clouds which he had interpreted as showing portents of war, and that well before the declaration. The exact date of issue is not known but the book was favourably reviewed as early as 17 January 1915<sup>27</sup>.



Figure 3. Cover of Harry Phillips' book *The Cloud*<sup>8</sup>.

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