Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE5409

Kienzle, Mena Hallett (Hally)

(1880 - 1956)

Born	18800403, Fremantle Western Australia Australia
Died	19560411, Port MoresbyPort Moresby Papua New Guinea

Summary

Hally Kienzle was living in Fiji with her German-born husband when war broke out in 1914. Although her husband was a naturalised British subject, he and his family were deported to Australia for internment as enemy aliens. From October 1917 they were interned in the Bourke Concentration Camp before they were transferred to the Molonglo Concentration Camp in May 1918. Hally was released on parole on 29 May 1919 while her husband was imprisoned in Holsworthy Camp until 22 October 1919.

Details

Fourth generation Australian, Mena Hallett ‘Hally’ Pearse was the second of ten children, born to Jessie Alice (nee Armstrong) and James Pearse in Fremantle, Western Australia on 3 April 1879. James Pearse was a prominent businessman whose shoe manufacturing business, later known as Pearse and Swan, became a major company in Western Australia. He served as a councillor for Fremantle 1883-1895, for North Fremantle 1895-1917 and as Mayor of North Fremantle from 1898-1901.

On 11 September 1915, Hally married German-born Alfred Thomas Karl Kienzle at the Anglican Church, Levuka, Fiji. Alfred’s first wife had died soon after childbirth in 1914 leaving him with four young children – baby Wallace born in 1914, Elsa born in 1910, Laura born in 1907 and Herbert ‘Bert’ Thomson Kienzle born in 1905. During World War Two Bert became known as the ‘architect of Kokoda’ after establishing the legendary Kokoda Trail, a crucial transport route in Papua New Guinea, enabling the transport of food, munitions and medical supplies to Australian troops.

Alfred, from Stuttgart, managed German-owned Hedeman & Evers, exporters of copra and sugar, in Levuka. He had been a naturalised British subject since 7 June 1902, but in the growing anti-German sentiment in British colonies, naturalisation neither provided protection nor was considered to guarantee loyalty to Britain. Australia willingly imprisoned people from the Pacific, Asia and Africa considered enemy aliens because of their places of birth, possibly because of concerns about German expansion in the Pacific as much as concerns about loyalty. Suspected of having pronounced German sympathies because of an incident in which he knocked a picture of King George off the wall, by his account accidentally, Alfred was arrested and deported to Australia in May 1916 with the first shipment of enemy aliens, and interned at Trial Bay, New South Wales, the camp for the elite – merchants, naval officers, physicians, priests, university lecturers and German consuls. From 20 November 1916, Alfred appealed on several grounds to the Governor of Fiji, the Governor-General of Australia, the Minister for Defence, the British Secretary of State for the Colonies in London, and Justice John Musgrave Harvey who was the Official Visitor to Prisoner of War Internment Camps. The appeals included one on the ground of ill health which he attributed to his treatment when initially interned and for which he required surgery. After a Court of Inquiry did not uphold his complaint he requested to be sent to England as a British subject to appeal his case before the Privy Council. Another appeal concerned his deportation from Fiji and the liquidation of his business and sale of his assets, including the family home, in Fiji. None were successful and in October 1917 Hally and the four Kienzle children were also deported from Fiji to Australia, despite the fact that they were all natural-born British subjects. Hally’s sister, Daisy Schoeffel who was married to Kienzle’s cousin, was deported at the same time with her two children.

Both Hally and Daisy believed they were being removed from Fiji for their own protection because of the increasing anti-German sentiment among the European population in Fiji, however on arrival in Sydney they were heavily guarded and were not permitted communication with Australian relatives or friends. They were transported to Bourke Concentration Camp, New South Wales, a camp which included many families. There Hally requested to be interned with her husband, as did Daisy Schoeffel. Alfred Kienzle was transferred to Bourke.

The official paperwork for Hally’s internment states clearly that she was born in Australia, and that her parents were both

British subjects in those days before Australian citizenship existed. The handwritten official internment documents for Hally and the four children record a special observation that ‘As a natural born British subject will hold the government of the Commonwealth of Australia responsible and claim full damages for wrongful and illegal detention.’ However neither family was ever compensated.

Conditions at Bourke were poor. Hally’s sister Daisy recorded in her diary on arrival at Bourke ‘once I was able to get some candles from a store nearby and we were able to see the state of the rooms we had to live in, we women just broke down… Filthy conditions.’ They were given sacks of straw for bedding, rusty tin plates and mugs for eating and an old tin wash bucket for cooking. They had to wash their children under a tap in the backyard and cook on a stove made from four bricks and an iron bar. They had not been permitted to take any money with them from Fiji and Bourke meat and bread rations were often fly blown so they relied on fellow prisoners for food. Dysentery was rife and medical care scant.

After a German national, Georg Krafft, formerly German consul in Fiji, died of heatstroke in February 1918 the Swiss Consul, on behalf of Germany, objected to the Australian government about conditions at Bourke. As a result, in May 1918, families imprisoned at Bourke were moved to the Molonglo Concentration Camp at Fyshwick in the Federal Capital Territory (now the Australian Capital Territory). The camp comprised a series of wooden huts radiating out from an administrative centre, on a flat treeless plain. Built for around 3000 enemy aliens Britain planned to deport to Australia from China, the plan was dropped after German objections and threats of repercussions on British internees in Germany.

Conditions were generally better at Molonglo that at Bourke, as was their treatment under the camp leadership of former journalist Brigadier General Spencer Browne. Rations were fresher and more plentiful, but they suffered from the cold Canberra winter in poorly built wooden huts that kept out neither rain nor wind. They also suffered from the noise involved in living in wooden huts at close quarters with one another.

The prisoners created gardens, started a drama group and converted one of the huts to a theatre, developed an orchestra, established a school for the children and generally tried to make life as liveable as possible. Brigadier General Spencer Browne permitted occasional shopping trips to Queanbeyan for the prisoners and picnics by the Molonglo River. But still, they were prisoners and looked forward to freedom.

Although the war ended on 11 November 1918 the prisoners were not freed until 22 May 1919 when Hally was released on parole. At this point, Daisy Schoeffel wrote to Western Australian Member of Parliament the Hon. Henry Gregory appealing for his help to her family and her sister Hally’s family avoiding deportation to Germany along with other ‘enemy aliens’. In the letter to Gregory, Daisy told him: ‘what hurt us more than all the insults and hardships we were forced to endure during our 2 years internment, was the fact that we should have to suffer all this at the hands of our own men and in our country!’ She said they were made to feel like criminals and brought shame on their family. Hally was ill at the time but she endorsed the letter, saying that her sister had only mentioned a few of their sufferings: ‘to describe them all she would have to write a book.’ (NAA: CRS 457, Item 406/1; Fischer 1989).

In the letter Daisy also appealed to Gregory for Alfred Kienzle’s release. He had been transferred to Holsworthy Concentration Camp, near Liverpool south-west of Sydney, where he was held until October. Most enemy aliens were either forcibly or voluntarily deported to Germany. The Kienzle and Schoeffel families avoided deportation through appeals to the authorities by them and their influential family in Western Australia. The Fiji Legislative Council had passed an ordinance in August 1919 prohibiting former enemy aliens from returning to the island. By October 1919 when Alfred was released, the family was destitute with nowhere to go. They spent time in a Salvation Army facility in central Sydney while Alfred sought work, a challenge because returned soldiers were favoured over enemy aliens, however he was eventually successful.

Both during and after interment, Hally suffered from the nervous disorders developed by many internees. On top of the trauma of imprisonment in her own country, she struggled with the four children of her husband’s previous marriage, three of whom did not accept her. After release, the three elder children were sent to Germany to complete their education, easing the situation for her, and by the time they returned in 1925 they had matured and her health had improved a little, but she had been affected both mentally and physically by imprisonment.

It did not end there. In 1926 when Hally wished to buy a house for the family in Sydney, Military Intelligence forced her to withdraw from the sale contract. She was refused permission to purchase under the War Precautions (Land Transfer) Regulations because of her husband’s German origin and the property’s proximity to Botany Bay 2 miles away.

In 1933, with the rise of National Socialism in Germany and scarred by their experiences during World War One, Alfred and Hally changed their name by deed poll to Kingsley.
They eventually moved to Papua where Bert and Wallace had established a business. She died there on 11 April 1956.

Published resources

Book

The architect of Kokoda: Bert Kienzle, the man who made the Kokoda trail., Kienzle, Robyn, 2011

The Molonglo mystery: a unique part of Canberra's history, Foskett, Alan, 2006

More about Molonglo: the mystery deepens, Foskett, Alan, 2008

Enemy aliens: internment and the homefront experience in Australia, 1914-1920, Fischer, Gerhard, 1989

The enemy at home: German internees in World War I Australia, Helmi, Nadine and Fischer, Gerard, 2011

The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918: Australia during the war, Scott, Ernest, 1938

Resource Section

Harvey, Sir John Musgrave (1865 - 1940), Hutley, F.C., 1983,
http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/harvey-sir-john-musgrave-6594/text11351

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Site Exhibition

Canberra Women in World War I: Community at Home, Nurses Abroad, Clarke, Patricia and Francis, Niki, 2015,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/cww1

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