



ABOARD
the Seeteufel: Von Luckner and his Countess

"Count Felix von Luckner, German commerce raider in the last war, is reported to be again directing scattered German raider forces in the Pacific. This information is published in the American news magazine 'Newsweek.' Von Luckner, says 'Newsweek,' prepared for this work two years ago by cruising throughout the Pacific aboard the palatial yacht Seeteufel."—*The Dominion*, November 20, 1940.

SO Felix von Luckner is reported to be ranging the Pacific once again, directing scattered Nazi raiding forces. Whether that report is true or not we do not know, but it does recall memories of the Count's visit here two years ago. And if it were true it would at least set at rest the conjectures of countless people who have been wondering what has happened to him since he returned to Germany.

It would also be an ironic repayment of the hospitality which many New Zealanders, with the best of intentions, showered on him two years ago. It is no reflection on them that they did so. Rather the opposite, in fact, since they were holding out the hand of friendship to a man who had been an enemy—and has since become one again. But if it should turn out that this is the way von Luckner has repaid their gesture, it would be another object lesson that things are seldom what they seem and that, in the words of Little Buttercup, skimmed milk frequently masquerades as cream. For the only conclusion would be that von Luckner's sentimental journeying to his old haunts were nothing but surveys undertaken with further raiding exploits in view.

The Only Marked Rebuff

New Zealanders, it may be remembered, fell over themselves to make the Count and his Swedish wife at home. The amount of adulation he received would have made the average screen star turn green with envy, and the only marked rebuff during the whole of his stay was an official refusal to allow him to inspect a fortified island in Lyttelton Harbour, where he had been imprisoned during the Great War. The Count shed sentimental tears, protested that he knew

the run of the place anyway, but the military authorities remained firm.

It was in February, 1938, that von Luckner arrived in Auckland Harbour in his comfortable, remarkably well equipped auxiliary yacht Seeteufel, and from the day of his arrival he was feted and lionised. The Seeteufel was visited by thousands of curious sightseers. Indefatigably the Count signed autograph books, and copies of Lowell Thomas's book "The Sea Devil." He attended receptions, gave addresses. Perhaps his most fatuous gesture was to autograph pound notes when he made purchases.

The unkind allegation was even made that he sold autographs for 2/- each. "But it all goes to my boys" shrugged the Count. "After all, it costs a lot of money to keep my Seeteufel afloat."

On the Fat of the Land

Certainly von Luckner and his crew of young Nazis (including a highly skilled movie cameraman) appeared to live on the fat of the land. Brandies, wine and other costly liquors flowed freely at the receptions and parties he gave on board his yacht.

The Seeteufel itself was one of the most comfortable and best equipped yachts of its size ever to put into Auckland. She had powerful Diesel engines for auxiliary power and a very complete range of equipment such as depth sounding apparatus. The radio equipment, too, was of high efficiency, and the story went that the Count was in constant touch with Berlin.

Below, the Seeteufel was luxurious. The main saloon was panelled and carpeted and furnished in period. The Countess's boudoir was also charmingly furnished, and among the yacht's little luxuries were a private bathroom (h. and c.) and an elaborate refrigerator.

Visit to Mount Eden

It was indeed a sentimental journey for the Count. He revisited the island in the Hauraki Gulf where he was interned during the last war; he even revisited Mount Eden gaol, where for a short period he had been the guest of His Majesty.

"It is all so beautiful," he would observe, hand on his heart. "I get so many invitations. There are so many old

WHERE IS VON LUCKNER?

Memories Of A Visit Two Years Ago

— what you call them — diggers, who shake me by the hand."

Rumours that his visit had an ulterior motive pained the Count inexpressibly. "It is so ridiculous. I have my Government, you have your Government. Let us all be friends."

In von Luckner's private office hung signed photographs of Adolf Hitler and Himmler, but that may not have meant a thing.

Lectures on his wartime exploits which the Count gave in Auckland proved popular enough to encourage a theatrical firm to sponsor a lecturing tour of New Zealand. It was moderately successful, though in some places there were cold shoulders.

After his tour of this country, and several leisurely trips to beauty spots round the coast, von Luckner set sail for Australia, evidently expecting another enthusiastic welcome.

Australia was Different

He must have been sadly disappointed. Australia would have nothing of him. He made several attempts to address meetings in Sydney and Melbourne, but met with so hot a reception that he must have wished he had never set foot in the Commonwealth.

It was not that Australians disliked von Luckner himself (they paid generous tribute to his personal bravery); they just did not like his politics.

In fact, the Count's line of ballyhoo did not go down nearly as well as it had done in New Zealand, though to do him justice the amount of publicity he grabbed was still amazing.

Fun with Telephone Directories

One little trick which he demonstrated in Sydney, and which was at first hailed as the feat of strength of the century, was tearing a telephone directory in two with his bare hands. Husky young Australians protested that even if the Sydney telephone directory was a thick

one, it was all a matter of knack. Anyone could do it.

Whereupon began a wave of telephone directory tearing, even office boys and typistes demonstrating their strength so efficiently that Sydney was threatened with a shortage of directories.

High point of the jape was reached in Canberra. One day, while Parliament was sitting, an unknown visitor made the rounds of members' offices, tore up every telephone directory, and left a card, "Compliments of Felix Count von Luckner."

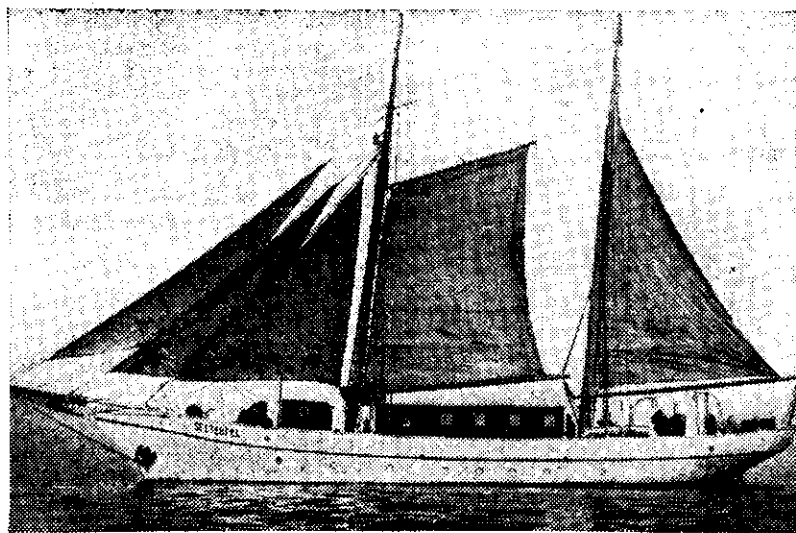
But notwithstanding the Count's tearful protestations and appeals to British fairplay, the majority of his meetings ended in riot and disorder. Von Luckner was not recognised as the hero of one of the most colourful exploits of the Great War; he was the emissary of a regime which was trampling liberties underfoot, which even then was menacing the peace of Europe, and which, in a word, stank in the nostrils of all good "Aussies."

Disillusioned, the Count left after a while, making a leisurely return voyage to Hamburg, and since then very little has been heard of him.

Another Side of the Picture

There was a sequel, however. When von Luckner left Auckland he took with him, as members of his crew, two young New Zealanders who had been announcers at Station 12B. One of them, soon disillusioned, left the Seeteufel at an early opportunity. The other stuck it out until he reached Germany, and then he, too, left.

In an Australian journal he wrote an account of his experiences on the Seeteufel, which painted a most unattractive picture of von Luckner. Conditions were poor, the crew unhappy, and the Count himself a most arrogant and difficult person. On top of this, alleged the New Zealander, von Luckner was "scared stiff" of rough weather, became violently sea sick. In fact, it was another instance of "The Captain hates the sea."



THE SEETEUFEL, von Luckner's world-cruising yacht