

Crime and punishment on the
Western Front: the Australian Imperial Force
and British Army discipline

by

Edward John Garstang, B.A. (Hons.)

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy of Murdoch University, 2009.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary institution.

Edward John Garstang

ABSTRACT

The Australian Imperial Force in the First World War had a deserved reputation as an effective fighting force, and at the same time had the worst disciplinary record away from the frontline when compared with other Dominion forces and the rest of the British Army. Australian indiscipline is a subject that has been largely ignored, or when dealt with as in the *Official History* by C. E. W. Bean, has had to pass through the filter of the Australian Legend. This study examines the link between Australian indiscipline and the privileged position they held of being the only force immune from the death penalty, except for mutiny, desertion to the enemy and traitorous activity. This simple fact would have a major influence on the relatively high numbers of absentees and desertions within Australian ranks. General Headquarters in France (GHQ) saw these high levels of indiscipline as a direct result of Australian authorities not allowing their soldiers to be placed under the Army Act in full. Further differences surfaced between the British and Australians when it came to punishment, with Australian courts criticised by British Army authorities for not using the powers they possessed to impose penalties that would act as a deterrent, as well as their reluctance to impose Field Punishment No. 1. This study examines these general differences as well as dealing with a specific case of an Australian soldier charged with the murder of a French civilian, a case that attracted the attention of senior political and military figures when it transpired Australians were immune from the death penalty for murder. Maintaining discipline was a constant struggle for the authorities when faced with those determined to avoid frontline duty either by committing military crime or through self-maiming. In this context the high venereal disease rate is discussed and

evidence presented that this could be considered as a self-inflicted wound. The mutiny in the 1st Battalion of September 1918 is examined as well as a mutiny in a military prison in France in 1919. It is not the purpose of this study to tarnish the reputation of the many thousands of brave men who fought in the AIF, rather it is an attempt to understand the high levels of indiscipline within the context of the war on the Western Front and the disciplinary code under which they operated.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>Pages</i>
Abstract:	<i>i-ii</i>
Acknowledgement:	<i>iv</i>
Introduction:	<i>v-xv</i>
List of Abbreviations	<i>xvi</i>
Chapter One: Unfavourable Comparisons	1-30
Chapter Two: This Privileged Position	31-67
Chapter Three: Field Punishment	68-91
Chapter Four: The War Within the War	92-113
Chapter Five: The September Mutinies	114-176
Chapter Six: The Men and the Mutiny at No. 7 Military Prison, Vendroux Les Attaques, Calais, 1919	177-222
Conclusion:	223-229
Appendices:	230-255
Bibliography:	256-265

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Michael Durey, for all the advice and encouragement he has given me throughout my studies and in the preparation of this doctorate thesis.