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Author(s): Douglas Gill and Gloden Dallas

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MUTINY AT ETAPLES BASE IN 1917

ON THE LAST DAY OF DECEMBER 1917 WILFRED OWEN WROTE TO HIS mother:

> Last year, at this time, (it is just midnight, and now is the intolerable instant of the Change) last year I lay awake in a windy tent in the middle of a vast, dreadful encampment. It seemed neither France nor England, but a kind of paddock where the beasts are kept a few days before the shambles. I heard the revelling of the Scotch troops, who are now dead, and who knew they would be dead. I thought of this present night, and whether I should indeed — whether we should indeed — whether you would indeed — but I thought neither long nor deeply, for I am a master of elision.
>
> But chiefly I thought of the very strange look on all faces in that camp; an incomprehensible look, which a man will never see in England, though wars should be in England; nor can it be seen in any battle. But only in Etaples.
>
> It was not despair, or terror, it was more terrible than terror, for it was a blindfold look, and without expression, like a dead rabbit's.[1]

Eight months after that night in Etaples described by Owen, the base was disrupted by a week of riot. Men poured out of the vast, dreadful encampment, attacked the military police, displaced the officers, and flooded through the town. Their demonstrations were suppressed, but were followed, in the eighteen months thereafter, by a multiplicity of riots, strikes and other conflagrations. These disturbances, though arising for a variety of reasons and rarely linking with each other, went far towards compelling reform, concession and measures of improvement; and led eventually to the dismantling of great sections of the army.

The incidents at Etaples Base in September 1917 formed by no means the largest mutiny in the British army of that day. But it was the first, and it lived, more vividly than all the others, in the memories of those who passed through the base camps on their way towards the front. Today, drawing on the military archives and on the recollections of men present at the time, the events of that week may be carefully set out. The Etaples mutiny throws light on the inner workings of the army: on the relationship, that is, between officers and men, between the men of one unit and those drawn from another, between the officers at Etaples and those at General Headquarters (G.H.Q.); and, not least, on the policy of Sir Douglas Haig in areas which military historians have chosen to neglect.

[1] *Wilfred Owen*: *Collected Letters*, ed. H. Owen and J. Bell (London, 1967), p. 521.

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In the late summer of 1917 the British Expeditionary Force, France and Flanders, was deployed along a section of the Western Front extending from the coast of Belgium to the head-waters of the Somme. In the trenches, behind the lines, gathered in the base depots, and strung out along the lines of communication, were gathered some two million officers and men. This great army, the largest which Great Britain has ever sent abroad, was manned, reinforced, armed, fed and generally supplied, along routes which started principally in England: routes passing through the English ports, across the Channel, and thence through the great bases on the northern coast of France. One such base was at Etaples, a small town in the Pas de Calais, some fifteen miles south of Boulogne. Etaples Base embraced port facilities, railway yards, stores, hospitals, prisons, training areas and all the encumbrances of an army at war; but consisted principally of a series of Infantry Base Depots (I.B.D.s), gathered on the rising ground to the east of the railway which runs north-south beside the town. Drafts from England for numerous infantry divisions passed through the I.B.D.s where, according to unit, they were regrouped, put through a period of training, and sent forward to the front. Also in the depots were to be found men transferring to other theatres of the war or classed as "Temporary Base" after hospital and convalescence. Between June 1915 and September 1917 more than a million officers and men passed through Etaples on their way up to the front.[2]

The base played an important part in the offensives of 1917. Etaples lay close to that part of the line which centred on Arras, and through the base passed tens of thousands of reinforcements for the operations of the spring and early summer. In June the main area of offensive moved northwards to Messines, and in August still further north to Ypres. As the year drew on, the hospitals and convalescent camps filled and re-filled with the wounded and the sick, while into the infantry depots were garnered for reinforcement and re-formation the survivors of battalions cut to pieces at the front.

At Etaples Base the troops met with conditions which all remember as oppressive. Not even the most experienced or battle-weary were given respite from the war. At the "Bull Ring", as the training grounds were called, soldiers barely discharged from hospital and men who had seen much service in the trenches were put through the same

[2] Public Record Office (hereafter P.R.O.), WO 95/4027, Base Commandant, Etaples, "War Diary" (hereafter Base Commandant's "War Diary"), monthly summary of events for Sept. 1917, p. 73.

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training as the latest drafts from England. A course in gas warfare and two weeks at the Bull Ring was the usual programme; two weeks, that is, of march and double-march across the dunes, supervised by officers and N.C.O.s of the "blood on the bayonet" school.[3] The march to and from the Bull Ring, and the training period itself, took up the entire day, while the conditions under which this programme had to be sustained were particularly poor. Etaples was a permanent base, but one informant recalls that the men's accommodation was confined to tents, that the principal meal of the day consisted of two slices of bully beef, two biscuits and an onion.[4] An officer remembers the training to have been "demoralising beyond measure"; one man, newly arriving at Etaples, found the Bull Ring to be "like passing through hell for 2 weeks"; while a corporal encountered several men returning to the front with wounds which were far from being healed. "When I asked why they had returned in that condition they invariably replied: 'To get away from the Bull Ring'."[5]

The harshness of the training, the state of the accommodation, and the difficulty of obtaining passes into town, compelled the greatest use of the facilities provided by the camp. The recreation huts, and the area close to the bridge which crossed the railway into town, were particularly crowded on Sunday afternoons, no training being undertaken after church parade. The afternoon of Sunday 9 September

[3] Interview with J. A. Mitchell, 17 Oct. 1965; Major O. C. Guinness, O.B.E., "Notes on the Mutiny at Etaples Base in 1917", MS. written for the authors in 1965; Lt. Col. T. C. Loveday, M.B.E., letter to the authors, 30 Sept. 1965. Mr. Mitchell served with the Cameronians; together with the remnant of his battalion, he was sent to Etaples from Arras. Major Guinness, then a captain, was Camp Adjutant, Etaples Base, during the period in question. The Australian Official History confirms their information about the operation of the base. C. E. W. Bean, *The Australian Imperial Force in France, 1916* (The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, vol. iii, Sydney, 1929), pp. 176-8.

[4] Interview with J. A. Mitchell. An inspection of the ground in 1969 lent confirmation to Mr. Mitchell's (and Wilfred Owen's) impressions of accommodation at the base. The land where the encampment stood remains unchanged: a windy, inhospitable heath, without trace of foundations for buildings more substantial than a handful of small huts. Owen, as an officer, had a tent to himself, a servant, and spent only a day or two there on his way to the front; drafts for his regiment, of course, would have passed between ten and fifteen days there under less salubrious conditions.

[5] Loveday, *loc. cit.*; anonymous letter to the authors, 29 Sept. 1965; J. Hays, letter to *The Observer*, London, 16 Feb. 1964. British convalescent camps in France were described by the Adjutant General as places "where men were exercised, well fed, encouraged to go in for games of all kinds, and kept amused by entertainments when the day's work was done"; but men left the convalescent camp at Etaples with less happy recollections. Sir Nevil Macready, *Annals of an Active Life* (London, 1924), pp. 225-6.

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1917 provided no exception. Nor was it exceptional that the military police should keep the bridge clear of troops; nor that the soldiers present should resent the actions of the police. At noon that day an N.C.O. had warned the police that men from the New Zealand Base Depot intended raiding the police hut in retribution for the arrest of one of their number on an earlier occasion. "As threats by Colonials were fairly common", no notice was taken of his words.[6] The threat to raid the police hut was not directly carried out, but an incident took place that afternoon which was to have graver consequences than any originally envisaged. At 3 o'clock the police at the bridge arrested a gunner of the New Zealand Artillery. He had committed no offence, he was later to allege, and was also gratuitously assaulted. He was soon released. The arrest, however, had been witnessed by others on the spot, and "some feeling was shown against the police".[7] By 4 o'clock a crowd had begun to gather, and in the next half hour or so was augmented by men leaving the camp cinema at the end of the afternoon performance. The crowd was now of threatening proportions. A New Zealander, on directly demanding the release of the arrested gunner, was taken into the guardroom and shown that, in fact, the prisoner had already been set free.[8] The revelation came too late. The crowd had grown until it pressed forward on to the bridge, and the military police were having difficulty in keeping order. An altercation between a policeman and an Australian took on more serious dimensions. A Scotsman belonging to a draft undergoing training at the base takes up the story.

> [The] Red Cap tried to move him [the Australian] away without any result so he brought force into it and that started something that others joined in till the Red Cap must have lost his head and started using his gun. He wounded one or two but hit our post Corporal (an innocent minding his own business and passing by) in the head, he I believe died later; I knew him and a grand and good-living chap he was.[9]

The crowd was naturally enraged.

[6] Base Commandant's "War Diary", 9 Sept. 1917. [7] *Ibid.* [8] *Ibid.*

[9] Anonymous letter of 29 Sept. 1965, *loc. cit.* The policeman concerned, Private H. Reeve, stated after the event that he had no revolver but, being threatened by the crowd, snatched one from an Australian or New Zealander. He fired two or three shots before the weapon was snatched from him in turn. Corporal W. B. Wood, 4th Bn. Gordon Highlanders, was hit in the head and died that evening; a Frenchwoman, standing in the road on the far side of the bridge, was also wounded. Reeve was convicted of manslaughter and received a sentence of one year's hard labour. Base Commandant's "War Diary", 9 Sept. 1917.

Military policemen in France commonly carried pistols; there would be no reason why a soldier should be carrying one, least of all on a Sunday afternoon in a base camp. A. V. Lovell-Knight, *The History of the Office of the Provost Marshal and the Corps of Military Police* (Aldershot, 1943), p. 74.

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> By this time hundreds had gathered and the Red Caps were having a tough time at their little huts on the Rly embankment being stoned by those who never missed an opportunity to get at them with a free hand to really enjoy it. The mob was angry and the Assistant Provo' Marshal soon turned on his horse when the stones started in his direction.[10]

Nearly four thousand men were present, but not all of them wished to take the matter further. One man remembers his group following its sergeant away from the demonstration, while thousands of soldiers had not yet left the different I.B.D.s.[11]

> I was in our camp when someone said there was some shooting at the bridge which was close to our camp. . . . Our camp commander a staff officer of (I think) the KOYLI or DLI appealed very strongly to the men from his camp to report back and like true Scots we did. I think the absentees was no more than seven.[12]

Numbers of the men in the depots, however, on learning of the shooting and the rush into Etaples, crossed over into town. And this despite the calling up of an officer and fifty men from the New Zealand Base Depot, of a further two hundred reinforcements, and of an assortment of officers from every I.B.D.[13] By 7.30 p.m. a thousand men had gathered in the town. Still in pursuit of the police, they tried to break into a café in which two military policemen had taken refuge. According to the base commandant, Brigadier-General A. Graham Thomson, the crowd's hostility was directed against the police, and his officers went more or less unscathed.[14] The Camp Adjutant remembers a more dramatic sequence of events.

> Word of the incident went round to all the depots and that night . . . the men poured into the town and refused to obey orders.
>
> One of the Staff Captains at the office of the Officer i/c Reinforcements, a very brave man, stood on the parapet of the bridge, with a drop of about 40 ft. below him, and started to harangue the men but they disregarded him.
>
> Before this, he attempted to stop the men crossing the bridge by lining up a lot of officers from the camp about six deep but the men swept them aside. They swarmed into town, raided the office of the Base Commandant, pulled him out of his chair and carried him on their shoulders through the town.[15]

Nor were the officers merely disregarded.

[10] Anon. letter of 29 Sept. 1965, *loc. cit.*

[11] Base Commandant's "War Diary", 9 Sept. 1917; interview with J. A. Mitchell.

[12] Anon. letter of 29 Sept. 1965, *loc. cit.*

[13] Base Commandant's "War Diary", 9 Sept. 1917.

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] Guinness, "Notes on the Mutiny". Some weight is added to Major Guinness's recollections, as compared to the base commandant's diary written at the time, by the fictionalized account of the mutiny given in Henry Williamson's novel, *Love and the Loveless* (London, 1958), pp. 251-66. Charles Carrington, in *Soldier from the Wars Returning* (London, 1965), pp. 244-5, an autobiography displaying the licence of a novel, remembers being told, on arriving in Etaples in mid-September 1917, that for twenty-four hours "the town and the base were in the hands of a mob of soldiers who had thrown the commandant into the river".

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> . . . some of the officers attached to the office of the Officer i/c Reinforcements, myself among them, had to make our way down a path on the railway embankment in order to get to our billet in the town. We had a few stones thrown at us. Luckily we managed to get a lift on a passing engine.[16]

By 10 o'clock all the men were back in camp.[17]

On the following day, Monday 10 September 1917, the troops returned to training, drafts continued to move to and from Etaples, and the authorities took steps to counter further demonstrations. In the morning Lieutenant-General Asser, General Officer Commanding, Lines of Communication, and Major Dugdale, Assistant Provost Marshal, reached Etaples and conferred with the officers involved. A field officer was put in charge of Etaples town and all guards and pickets there; and a hundred men were sent from the Le Touquet Lewis Gun School to Paris Plage, a town adjacent to Etaples and just along the coast, in case the trouble spread. The forces of conciliation were similarly increased, by ordering all officers to be present in their depots between 5.30 and 10.00 p.m. A board of inquiry began to collect evidence as to what had happened on the Sunday.[18]

These steps were not successful, and the crowds that gathered late Monday afternoon and evening proved hardly less determined than they had been the previous day. At 4 o'clock groups of men broke through the pickets on the bridge and held meetings in the town.[19] According to one report, a committee was elected, of perhaps six men chaired by a corporal of the Northumberland Fusiliers.[20] Some soldiers tried to stop traffic through the town, while others headed down the river road for the detention camp. They were spotted at 6.30 p.m., addressed by the base commandant, and then led back to camp. A little later, a hundred men tried to enter the field punishment enclosure. They dispersed after being addressed in turn by the commandant. At 9.00 p.m. a further hundred men gathered at the railway station; they too heeded an officer's appeals. A thousand men had assembled at the railway bridge, but "were evidently from their temper not out to make any further trouble".[21]

On Tuesday 11th September the base commandant resolved to seek reinforcements from outside. He urged the Chief Provost Marshal of the Armies who, together with Colonel Wroughton of the

[16] Guinness, "Notes on the Mutiny".
[17] Base Commandant's "War Diary", 9 Sept. 1917.
[18] *Ibid.*, 10 Sept. 1917.
[19] *Ibid.*
[20] Interview with J. A. Mitchell.
[21] Base Commandant's "War Diary", 10 Sept. 1917.

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Adjutant General's staff, had arrived that day, to put the matter direct to General Headquarters — "troops from outside were urgently required". The Provost Marshal promised to do this, but before G.H.Q. could even be informed, Brigadier-General Thomson and his staff sought to hasten reinforcement. They tried to get in touch with 9th Cavalry Brigade direct.[22] "It was . . . felt . . . that Cavalry could usefully be employed"; but the unassuming language used by the Etaples authorities in setting down their feelings spoke of a sense of calm belied both by their unreasonable assumption that cavalry would be forthcoming from so insignificant a unit without first clearing it with G.H.Q., and by a series of impetuous mistakes. The telephone call to 9th Cavalry Brigade was put through in error to Cavalry Corps H.Q. Without breaking off the call or even speaking to the corps commander himself, the request was bluntly made: could two squadrons of the 15th Hussars, presently at Frencq, be held in readiness to move? To this request, no answer could be given. Within half an hour, however, a staff captain from Etaples had driven off to Frencq to inform the regiment what its duties would involve.[23]

At 2.30 p.m. Cavalry Corps H.Q. rang back. They would not move without sanction from above. Etaples, accordingly, telephoned H.Q., Lines of Communication, which in turn contacted G.H.Q. itself. About 4.00 p.m. an answer was received. G.H.Q. would not authorize the intervention of the cavalry. It would, however, send seven or eight hundred men of the Honourable Artillery Company (H.A.C.), the first battalion of which was stationed at Montreuil.[24]

That afternoon there were further demonstrations. Just as G.H.Q. was making its reply, men were again breaking through the pickets. A crowd of soldiers passed through the picket on the bridge, marched through the town, broke the picket on the bridge across the River Canche, and struck northwards towards Paris Plage. None of the pickets made determined efforts to prevent the march. The officer who had saved the railway station the night before, meeting the demonstrators near Paris Plage, persuaded them to return to camp with him. There they dispersed. Not all the men returned to camp that night, five arrests being made in Etaples town itself.[25]

[22] *Ibid.*, 11 Sept. 1917.
[23] *Ibid.*
[24] *Ibid.*; *The Honourable Artillery Company in the Great War 1914-1919*, ed. G. Goold Walker (London, 1930), p. 99.
[25] Base Commandant's "War Diary", 11 Sept. 1917.

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Wednesday 12th September saw an enlargement of these demonstrations. Tuesday's march to Paris Plage had not involved more than three hundred men. On Wednesday, in the attempt to stop the demonstrations, all troops were confined to camp except for training. At 3.00 p.m., however, a thousand men broke bounds, marched through the town and thence to Paris Plage. They then returned to camp. The pickets failed to stop them, and the Honourable Artillery Company had not yet reached Etaples. Some cars were interfered with, but no important incidents took place.[26]

That day, Lieutenant-General Asser made a further visit to Etaples. He gave final sanction to the bringing up of the H.A.C., but the continuing failure to contain the demonstrations perhaps raised doubts in his and other minds as to whether that unit could make a sufficient show of force. G.H.Q. was also reconsidering this question and now agreed that cavalry should at least be held in readiness. A wire was received at Etaples, just as the thousand demonstrators were passing through the town, to the effect that the 15th Hussars, plus one section, Machine Gun Squadron, were in readiness to move. Later in the day, word came through of further preparations. The 19th Hussars and four machine guns could also move at one hour's notice. Etaples asked that these units should be kept at the ready.[27]

On Wednesday evening the H.A.C. arrived: a detachment of four hundred officers and men. They at once took up their posts but, the day's demonstrations being over, had no duties to fulfil.[28]

Next morning all was thoroughly prepared. The Honourable Artillery Company was in position, the Hussars and the machine guns were still in readiness to move. Etaples was confident that before the day was out it would have re-established full military control. It had informed the French authorities that order would be "immediately" restored; now it was taking steps to carry out its promise. All ammunition was collected from the soldiers in the I.B.D.s, and, a roll-call being taken, it was found that only twenty-three men were missing. It was the turn, however, of G.H.Q. to show unreasonable concern. Just after 11.00 a.m. on Thursday morning it wired that two infantry battalions, both from 7th Division, were on their way; at 12.45 p.m. it sent the further information that not just a regiment of cavalry, but an entire brigade, was

[26] *Ibid.*, 12 Sept. 1917.
[27] *Ibid.*
[28] *Ibid.*

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now held at the ready. Etaples wired back: the brigade was not required.[29]

In the event, the H.A.C. did the job unaided. Only two hundred men broke camp on Thursday evening, and they did so mainly by choosing more circuitous routes than that offered by the Three Arch Bridge. Indeed, in trying unsuccessfully to force the H.A.C.'s picket on the bridge, "two of the ringleaders were injured by entrenching tool handles". The majority of the men were back in camp by 9.00 p.m.[30]

On Friday 14th September the pickets provided by the H.A.C. were dispensed with, and policing returned to a more conventional basis. The original body of police, however, was not restored. Fresh personnel, to fill the ranks of the camp police, the foot police and the mounted police, had been drafted in, and was now in sufficient strength to handle all normal calls upon it. The H.A.C. was removed from the forefront of affairs, one company being held in the town with the remainder in reserve.[31] Of the two infantry battalions sent by G.H.Q., the first — the 1st Battalion, Royal Welch Fusiliers — had arrived about midnight, the second — the 22nd Battalion, Manchester Regiment — not until 4.30 Friday morning. One company of the Fusiliers was sent that afternoon to guard the detention camp, while the remainder of the battalion stood to. The 22nd Manchesters were kept in camp nearby.[32] The cavalry units held at the ready received the following advice:

> It is considered now that Cavalry will not be required at all unless situation materially alters. Adequate number of Infantry now available and ringleaders are being arrested. Trouble expected to subside rapidly.[33]

This was shortly before midday. On Friday afternoon, between fifty and sixty men again broke out of camp but were arrested in Etaples.[34] The authorities were now certain that the disturbances were over. On Saturday 15th September the town of Etaples was thrown open to the soldiers in the I.B.D.s. The 22nd Manchesters bathed in the sea, played football and watched a concert. They remained in the area until 17th September. That day the Royal

[29] *Ibid.*, 13 Sept. 1917.
[30] *Ibid.*
[31] *Ibid.*, 14 Sept. 1917.
[32] P.R.O., WO 95/1665, 1st Bn., Royal Welch Fusiliers, "War Diary", 14 Sept. 1917; P.R.O., WO 95/1669, 22nd Bn., Manchester Regiment, "War Diary", 14 Sept. 1917; Base Commandant's "War Diary", 14 Sept. 1917.
[33] P.R.O., WO 95/574, General Staff, Cavalry Corps, "War Diary", 14 Sept. 1917.
[34] Base Commandant's "War Diary", 14 Sept. 1917.

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Welch Fusiliers also left, as did next day the detachment from the H.A.C.[35]

At this point, narrative account of these incidents must cease. There is no further reference to the mutiny in the archives now open to the public, and reliable eye-witness accounts have not appeared in print. After so great a lapse of time further and well-informed witnesses are unlikely to come forward, while, given public policy in these matters, it will not be known what court martials or courts of inquiry were actually convened, let alone the substance of their findings, until the year 2017. Even then, given the limitations of court proceedings as a guide to disaffection in the army, little may emerge to illuminate the soldiers' motives or their organizing skills. The diaries kept by the staff at Etaples Base and at the headquarters of other units which chanced to be involved, while fully comprehensive and permitting the description of the disaffection on a day-by-day, and even hour-by-hour basis, leave us with an imperfect picture of conditions at the base and the temper of the troops.[36] We can, however, list some factors which, in the opinion of those present at the time, played an important part in the outbreak of the incidents described.

The camp adjutant, Major Guinness, writing fifty years after the event, remembers as "the chief cause of discontent" the fact that men who had already done much service at the front had to undergo

[35] *Ibid.*, 15, 17 and 18 Sept. 1917; P.R.O., WO 95/1669, 22nd Bn., Manchester Regiment, "War Diary", 15-17 Sept. 1917. Curiously, Charles Carrington "saw" a battalion of the Manchesters, which had been "plucked out of Passchendaele", "patrolling the streets of Etaples in fighting order, on 17th September . . . most cheerfully engaged in restoring order": Carrington, *op. cit.*, p. 245. The 22nd Manchesters had not been plucked out of Passchendaele; with the rest of 7th Division, the battalion had been withdrawn into G.H.Q. reserve at the beginning of August, and was not due to return to the front until the end of September. Nor was it to be seen patrolling the streets of Etaples, cheerfully or otherwise, on 17th September or indeed on any other day. On the basis of his observations, Carrington concludes: "While not grudging the rioters their bit of fun, the joke had gone far enough and it was time to get on with the war". See P.R.O., WO 95/1669, 22nd Bn., Manchester Regiment, "War Diary", Sept. 1917, and WO 95/1633, General Staff, H.Q., 7th Division, "War Diary", Aug. and Sept. 1917.

[36] The fact that the archives are open to him places the historian of the British army in a fortunate position. Historians of the French army mutinies in 1917 are denied such access; and, relying heavily on recollections and fading newspaper accounts, even the more serious offer only bold strokes of the brush: comparisons of Generals Pétain and Nivelle, generalizations about socialist influence in the army, impressions of conditions at the front. Such studies are doubtless of interest, but they relate to French political life, French strategy, or the psychology of several million *poilus*, rather than the analysis, unit by unit, hour by hour, of how the mutinies unfolded. A useful work, in recent years, is R. M. Watt, *Dare Call it Treason* (London, 1964); but it is very incomplete.

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"the same strenuous training as the drafts of recruits arriving from home". Equally, the usual regimental links between officers and men had been disrupted by the arrangements at the base.

> It should be realised that each Infantry Base Depot was commanded by an elderly retired officer who had an adjutant to help him. The remaining officers, like the men, were either reinforcements from home, or had been sent down the line on account of ill-health, and therefore did not know them.[37]

These officers lacked the authority to contain their men after the shooting at the bridge. On one point all witnesses agree: the fracas at the bridge, culminating in the death of Corporal Wood, provided a powerful focus for resentment of the police. We have already noted Wood's standing in his regiment and the effect which his injury had upon the crowd. The base commandant's diary, in effect, attributes responsibility for the entire week of trouble to the military police, while the officers of the H.A.C., arriving in Etaples on the Wednesday, learnt that "riots had broken out ... owing to the unpopular edicts and actions of a certain Provost Marshal" — the Provost Marshal, of course, being the officer responsible for the military police.[38] The police in any army are usually disliked, but a particular hatred surrounded the contingent at Etaples. They had not served at the front, it seems, but had been brought in from Aldershot; and it was the disciplinary standard of the glasshouse that they had been trying to impose. Private Reeve, the man responsible for the death of Corporal Wood, was an ex-boxer, and was remembered as something of a bully.[39]

If conditions at the base camp, the loose hold of the officers, and the unpopularity of the military police are spoken of from many sides, less is known about the attempt to give some wider purpose to the demonstrations. The base commandant explained the activities of the troops in terms of their desire to seek out, and deal retribution to, the military police; hence the march on the detention camp, the field punishment enclosure and the railway station, in all of which the police might have taken refuge.[40] Another witness remembers a different purpose directing the actions of the men. The plight of military prisoners was well-known to the soldiers at Etaples. Inadequately maintained and fed, and confined in cells

[37] Guinness, "Notes on the Mutiny". C. E. W. Bean agrees that the delays imposed on trained men by the requirements for further training at the base were "often exasperating". Bean, *The Australian Imperial Force in France, 1916* (*op. cit.*, iii), p. 177.

[38] *The Honourable Artillery Company in the Great War 1914-1919*, pp. 99-100.

[39] Interview with J. A. Mitchell.

[40] Base Commandant's "War Diary", 10 Sept. 1917.

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situated in the lowest, dampest part of the dunes, men being punished for serious offences but who had been spared the penalty of death lived out their periods of sentence. Their release might only be a gesture but it would, it seems, have been viewed with general satisfaction.[41] Even so, the pursuit of the police, or the release of prisoners, could scarcely account for the continuing daily demonstrations; and their orderliness presents something of a puzzle. Riots, more or less destructive, were fairly common in the army, particularly in the closing period of war, and strikes — refusals of duty in support of specific objects — became very popular. But the incidents at Etaples Base fall into neither category. It is the combination of the sudden riot on the Sunday afternoon, followed by demonstrations every afternoon and evening, which provides the most unusual aspect of the affair; and yet, apart from occasional references to "noisy 'meetings' " and the like,[42] nothing is known of the kind of organization which was so certainly thrown up, or of the deliberations of those who took part.

Perhaps the presence of both Scottish and Anzac (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) soldiers gave the mutiny a cohesiveness which a riot could not have otherwise attained. The part played by Anzac soldiers on the opening Sunday at Etaples forms but one instance of the difficulties which arose between the British army, with its "traditions of duty and long-suffering" and its fixed gulf between officers and men, on the one hand, and a band of adventurers, all volunteers, who had travelled across the world to fight in someone else's war, on the other.[43] Anzac troops were contemptuous of the narrow discipline to which British troops subscribed, and were led by officers who had invariably first shown their qualities as privates in the ranks.[44] Social distinctions between

[41] Interview with J. A. Mitchell.

[42] Base Commandant's "War Diary", 10 Sept. 1917.

[43] The Hon. J. W. Fortescue, *A History of the British Army* (London, 1930), xiii, pp. 489-90, 573. The Australian and New Zealand Army Corps in France consisted of one New Zealand and five Australian divisions. The New Zealand Base Depot had only recently been established in Etaples, but that for the Australian divisions was being moved to Le Havre. Senior officers and the military police found the New Zealanders no more tractable than the Australians, and men from both countries appear to have been present at Etaples in September 1917.

[44] Bean, *op. cit.*, iii, pp. 53-4, 870-1; C. E. W. Bean, *The Australian Imperial Force in France during the Main German Offensive, 1918* (The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, vol. v, Sydney, 1937), p. 31; C. E. W. Bean, *The Australian Imperial Force in France during the Allied Offensive, 1918* (The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, vol. vi, Sydney, 1942), pp. 19-20.

(cont. on p. 100)

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officers and men, so characteristic of the British army, were therefore less pronounced; Australian-born soldiers could not, for instance, be induced to serve as officers' servants, while the British system of superior messing arrangements for officers, universal even in the trenches, was not found in Anzac front-line units.[45] Inevitably, Anzac soldiers were in constant trouble with the British authorities responsible for discipline and order. In the Egyptian theatre, they intimidated the local inhabitants, the military police, and other Allied soldiers; eventually General Allenby sent them home stripped of all recommendation for decoration or reward.[46] In France they were the bane of authority from the Adjutant General to the most junior members of the military police; they provided the highest rates of desertion, insubordination and venereal disease.[47]

If the insubordination of the Anzacs played an important part on the first day of the mutiny, it was the Scottish troops, present in far greater numbers, who gave the mutiny its force. Discipline in the Scottish regiments was as fierce and narrow as it was easy-going among the Anzacs, and social differences were also very marked. Nonetheless, Scotsmen and Anzacs got on well together, and one historian has emphasized "the quite remarkable friendship which ripened between the soldiers of the two nations" in the First World War.[48] At Etaples, this close relationship built a degree of trust and understanding which helped to convert a sudden riot of four thousand men into a series of daily demonstrations; it supplied, among the shifting and temporary population of a base camp, the loyalties which,

(note 44 cont.)

The volumes which C. E. W. Bean wrote for the Australian government deserve some mention. He deals frankly with questions of discipline and morale, and is very informative on social relations within the British and Australian forces. His work contrasts favourably with the dreary apologia which make up the British official history of the war.

[45] Bean, *op. cit.*, iii, p. 125; Bean, *op. cit.*, vi, pp. 6, 21.

[46] P.R.O., WO 95/4725, Egyptian Expeditionary Force, Palestine Lines of Communication, A. and Q.M.G.'s Branch, "Monthly Reports", 1918-19; A. F. Nayton, letter to *The Times*, London, 29 May 1964.

[47] Haig complained frequently of the disorderly conduct of the Anzacs, and wrote of desertion reaching "alarming proportions" among the Australian divisions. Both he and the Adjutant General felt that this behaviour stemmed from the refusal of the Australian government to permit him to execute offenders. Bean, *op. cit.*, v, pp. 26-8; Macready, *Annals of an Active Life*, p. 278. Some striking statistics concerning the incidence of military offences and venereal disease amongst the Anzacs will be found in P.R.O., WO 95/444 and WO 95/445, A. and Q.M.'s Branch, Fourth Army H.Q., "War Diary", 1918. See also Bean, *op. cit.*, vi, p. 1,085.

[48] Bean, *op. cit.*, iii, p. 754.

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on the lower decks at Spithead and the Nore, had taken months and years to build.[49]

The importance of the link between Anzac and Scottish troops becomes evident when we consider the conduct of men drawn from a community which had reason to mistrust and fear the Scots — the Catholic Irish. While Scottish troops were thronging through Etaples, men of the 16th (Irish) Division refused active part in what was taking place. "All they did was to raid the canteen and sit outside and get drunk and encourage the others."[50] That this attitude could have easily turned to outright opposition is illustrated by the following incident which occurred during disturbances at Calais Base in 1918:

> The 51st (Highland) Division came out of the line for a rest .... They went out of Camp and in to the Town of Calais and had a rough time with the Military Police. We heard that the Jocks had thrown some Red Caps into the sea at Calais.
>
> This affair lasted some days when one evening about three hundred reserve men at the Base were ordered to fall in with arms and ammunition at the entrance to the Camp and told by a Major on the Camp Staff that they might have to open fire on these men if they did not return [to] Camp peacefully. The men on Parade were Southern Irishmen and some of them said why not remember Bachelor's Walk, meaning the time that the K[ing's] O[wn] S[cottish] B[orderer]s fired on a Dublin Crowd.[51]

The attitude of the Irish troops at Etaples Base was probably connected with the deteriorating condition of the 16th Division and its eventual disintegration, the consequence of the rise of nationalism in Ireland; but it also forms part of a continuing and mutual hostility between the Irish and the Scots.[52]

[49] The loyalties of both Scottish and Anzac troops were sometimes narrowly conceived, and led to trouble on a number of occasions. In April 1918, for instance, during the most desperate few days of the war, when the German army swept towards the sea, drafts for the Gordon Highlanders refused orders rather than serve under the officers of the Black Watch; five months later, several Anzac battalions mutinied rather than undergo disbandment. P.R.O., WO 95/4018, Commandant, Calais Base, "War Diary" and accompanying MS. diary, 3 Apr. 1918; Bean, *op. cit.*, vi, pp. 937-9.

[50] Major O. C. Guinness, letter to the authors, 11 Aug. 1965. The 16th Division was recruited in the south.

[51] W. J. Pogue, letter to the authors, 14 Nov. 1965. Mr. Pogue, a warrant officer, was serving with the Royal Dublin Fusiliers. The official record of these incidents, which for a time looked like developing into a more violent repetition of the Etaples affair, is to be found in P.R.O., WO 95/4018, Commandant, Calais Base, "War Diary", 21-6 July 1918.

[52] The morale of the 16th Division was not directly touched by the Easter Rising, but the drying up of recruitment and the growing opposition in Ireland to the war no less surely undermined it. The British government dared not introduce conscription into Ireland, and had to choose between reinforcing the division with non-Irish drafts (an expedient shameful to both officers and men), and permitting its demise. It chose the first; but the military disasters of 1918 brought about the second.

(cont. on p. 102)

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It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the wider problems of morale, or to link the Etaples incidents with other outbreaks during the last months of the war. To do full justice to these topics involves much more than a discussion of "war weariness", a restatement of the unending lists of casualties and deaths; it takes us deep into the history of the different units which formed the B.E.F., their recruitment, social basis, military standing, war experience and so on. But we can accept that by September 1917 morale had in fact diminished, that the spirit of the Old Army had not survived three years of war intact. The questions then arise: What measures did the military authorities then take to curb further and dangerous unrest? What policy did G.H.Q. adopt towards indiscipline in the light of the disruptions at Etaples? Before answering these questions it will be helpful to digress: to describe, very briefly, the quite different measures taken to deal with other mutinies in the B.E.F. contemporaneous with the outbreak at Etaples. These mutinies, involving men of the Labour Corps, began in September 1917 and continued for some months. The official attitude towards them, and the steps taken to contain them, are worth mentioning, for they throw much light on the situation at Etaples and the policies which G.H.Q. evolved.

On 5 September 1917, a few days before the outbreak at Etaples, two companies of labour troops, stationed at Boulogne, struck work, dissatisfied with the terms of their employment. The following day, they again refused to work, and tried to break out of camp. Themselves quite unarmed, they were immediately shot down. Twenty-three were killed and twenty-four wounded. That afternoon they "went to work without further trouble".[53] Four days later the Commandant, Calais Base, learnt that the men of No. 74 Labour Company also refused to work. He conferred with his superior and when, next day, 11th September, this company again declined, the authorities were ready. Four men were killed, fifteen wounded, and twenty-five more given prison sentences within the day.[54] One month later a "disturbance" took place in a labour company

(note 52 cont.)

With regard to the continuing antipathies between Irish and Scottish troops, it may be noted that a battalion of the Seaforth Highlanders played an important part in evicting the 1st Bn., Connaught Rangers, from their barracks in the Punjab in July 1920, after a mutiny directed against British rule in Ireland.

[53] P.R.O., WO 95/83, Director of Labour, G.H.Q., "War Diary", Sept. 1917, Annexure F.

[54] P.R.O., WO 95/4018, Commandant, Calais Base, "War Diary", 10-12 Sept. 1917.

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stationed in the First Army area; five men were killed and fourteen wounded.[55] Similarly, strikes organized elsewhere by men of the Labour Corps were "overcome"; the casualties are not recorded.[56] In December 1917 a guard detachment opened fire on the men of No. 21 Labour Company, stationed at Fontinettes, near Calais; four were killed, nine wounded, when the rest went back to work.[57] Despite such rebuffs, strikes among labour companies continued to occur.[58]

These troops, of whom well over 100,000 were to be found in France, were under military discipline and formed, as much as did the drafts who demonstrated at Etaples, an integral part of the B.E.F. One characteristic alone distinguished them from the soldiers at Etaples: the colour of their skins. The companies concerned contained only natives, recruited in China, Egypt and elsewhere. The records of the strikes are incomplete, and the instances here set out may well form only a portion of the slaughter which actually took place. Still, whatever may be thought about these shootings, they throw much light on official response to the demonstrations at Etaples. Immediately one thing is clear. At Etaples, the bringing up of a battalion of the Honourable Artillery Company and its arming, not with rifles, but with staves, reveals a degree of restraint on the part of the authorities which did not flow from principle alone. Practical considerations must have played the major part. Records of a discussion of this matter at G.H.Q. or in Etaples are either unavailable or do not exist; but if the army had no scruples about shooting down intransigents, the situation at Etaples nonetheless presented a dilemma. The nature of this dilemma was touched on in a letter which the officer commanding, Chinese Labour Corps, wrote to his superior at G.H.Q. He described the existing mode of suppressing strikes and demonstrations. "Disturbances among Chinese can, of course, be quelled by drastic measures, i.e. shooting those who are temporarily out of hand", the officer confessed, "but if this procedure be solely relied on", further unrest among Chinese labour troops in France might very well ensue.[59] The policy, in brief, would always be effective, but might have repercussions in other parts of France. These considerations must have weighed

[55] P.R.O., WO 95/83, Director of Labour, G.H.Q., "War Diary", Oct. 1917.
[56] *Ibid.*
[57] *Ibid.*; P.R.O., WO 95/4018, Commandant, Calais Base, "War Diary", 16 Dec. 1917.
[58] E.g. *ibid.*, 25 Feb. and 12 Mar. 1918.
[59] P.R.O., WO 1971/33, letter from Lt. Col. Commanding Chinese Labour Corps to Director of Labour, G.H.Q., 25 Dec. 1917.

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more heavily in respect of the situation at Etaples. To fire on soldiers there might have spread disturbance throughout the back areas of France and affected even units in the trenches; yet to take no steps towards the restoration of control threatened military authority. Just how difficult a path G.H.Q. had to tread is shown by the variety of units which it brought up, or held in readiness, for intervention at the base. Its choice of units, culminating in the part allotted to the H.A.C., sheds light on the dilemma.

For three days, it will be recalled, the Etaples base commandant had no troops available on whom he could rely. On the first day, his police were driven off, and every attempt to use infantrymen from one or other of the less affected I.B.D.s, to use New Zealanders against a primarily Scottish crowd, and so on, was thwarted by the unwillingness of the troops concerned to stop the demonstrations. He asked, therefore, that cavalry be sent. This request, together with G.H.Q.'s response, may be readily understood. On the one hand, the commandant could not feel confident that front-line infantry brought in from other places would necessarily prove unsympathetic to the men. Cavalry units had always regarded themselves as something of an élite; and if brought up, together with their horses, might form a useful force in quashing demonstrations. On the other hand, the use of cavalry represented something of a risk. Cavalry would be of little use in forming pickets on the bridge and railway embankment; it would be most effective in a dramatic clearing of the streets. Yet, if it undertook that duty, the troopers would necessarily need arms, if only batons, when the shock and violence of the action, the provocation offered by the men on horses, and the certainty of casualties, might well excite the anger of hundreds who, far from being ill-organized and unarmed demonstrators — against whom, in civil questions, cavalry or mounted policemen traditionally are used — were men whose skill and firearms had already seen the disappearance of the German cavalry from the battlefield, from the history even, of European war.

By Thursday, the fifth day of the mutiny, these objections had all been overcome. The greatest danger confronting the authorities now lay in permitting the demonstrations to continue, in allowing discipline to be wilfully defied. Accordingly G.H.Q. sent into Etaples, or held in readiness for operations there, four different units: a brigade of cavalry; the 1st Battalion, Royal Welch Fusiliers; the 22nd Battalion, Manchester Regiment; and a detachment from the 1st Battalion, Honourable Artillery Company. The 1st Battalion, Royal Welch Fusiliers, was the regular battalion of an illustrious

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regiment, and one whose reputation was quite the equal of any unit whose drafts had joined the demonstrations at Etaples. On their loyalty, of all the regiments of foot, the army could surely place a maximum of trust. Robert Graves, who had served with this battalion, maintained to Bertrand Russell that the Fusiliers would fire on striking munition workers if called upon to do so; and there seemed a chance, during their days of service at Etaples, that they might have to shoot down fellow soldiers.[60] The reputation of the 22nd Manchesters was less widespread. A service battalion, it had been created in the first months of the war. Nonetheless, overcoming its humble origins, and drawing its soldiers from an area which Graves has classed as second only to the north Midlands in providing men of a reliable type, it was in 1917 serving together with the 1st R.W.F. in 7th Division — "one of the recognized top-notch divisions" in the B.E.F.[61] The division had been withdrawn in August into G.H.Q. Reserve and had spent a month in billets.[62] In September, no more reliable an infantry force could accordingly have been found.

In the event, the authorities relied neither on the Fusiliers nor on the Manchesters. The Manchesters remained in camp throughout those days; and the generals at Etaples chose not to place in the Fusiliers the kind of confidence which Captain Graves had so easily displayed in conversation — the battalion was not used directly to confront the demonstrating troops. A detachment from the H.A.C. which, stationed at Montreuil, carried out guard duties for advanced G.H.Q. and acted as a training unit for officer cadets was used instead.[63] Eight weeks later, when the Winter Palace at St. Petersburg was stormed by Bolshevik workers and soldiers, the last vestige of a reliable and loyal force which the Provisional Government could place against them was a unit of officer cadets. At Etaples, the H.A.C. was the one unit on which complete reliance could be placed. Drawn from every section of society save from the working class, the cadets were certain to stand firm.[64] The attempt by soldiers drawn from the Scottish working class to reason their way

[60] Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That* (London, 1957), p. 220.
[61] G. L. Campbell, *The Manchesters* (London, 1916), pp. 73-4; Graves, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-2.
[62] P.R.O., WO 95/1633, General Staff, 7th Division, "War Diary", Aug. and Sept. 1917.
[63] *The Honourable Artillery Company in the Great War 1914-1919*, p. 99.
[64] Not long before being called on for duty at Etaples, the colonel commanding the 1st Bn., H.A.C., had been asked if he could find two hundred candidates worthy of commissions. He promptly guaranteed five hundred. *Ibid.*

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through a picket of the H.A.C. had not the slightest prospect of success.

Though news of the Etaples incidents never reached the press, and Sir Douglas Haig felt able, a fortnight later, to deny that "any discontent exists in our ranks", it was scarcely possible for his staff to assume that the trouble had blown over, to take no steps to guard against further discontent. Native labour troops continued to be subdued by shootings, but "this procedure" was too drastic to apply unreservedly elsewhere. Two weaknesses in administration had thus to be repaired. The first concerned the operation of Etaples Base Camp. The commandant, and the commanding officer and adjutant of the Royal Scots Base Depot, were all replaced. The system of training at the Bull Ring was more or less abandoned, reinforcements passing through Etaples now going straight up to the front to complete their training there.[65] Reform was probably made elsewhere, for it was "the belief of thousands . . . that it [the Etaples mutiny] changed the whole phase of routine and 'Bull' from Base to Front Line".[66] The second weakness concerned the army's machinery for dealing with unrest. It is evident from the confusion surrounding day-to-day decisions at Etaples that neither at G.H.Q. nor at the base had proper preparations been made to deal with outbreaks of this kind. At first, the base staff had handled the affair themselves, trying on their own initiative to call up reinforcements; but G.H.Q. was more and more drawn in. In addition to communication by telephone and telegraph, at least four officers from G.H.Q. came down to Etaples during that week of demonstration. The career of any one of these might be used to illustrate the improvements wrought thereafter in the machinery of administration, but that of J. B. Wroughton, of the Adjutant General's branch, G.H.Q., is of more than passing interest. The activities of this officer in the period 1918-19 illustrate the dexterity with which the Adjutant General's staff handled later outbreaks of unrest.

During 1918 Wroughton's was the guiding hand in dealing with a strike among German prisoners of war; with sporadic but continuing disturbances among front-line troops passing through Calais Base in the summer; with a stoppage of work at Le Havre Base; and with a strike at the Tank Corps workshops when "practically the whole of

[65] Base Commandant's "War Diary", 19 Sept., 20 Oct. 1917, and monthly summary of events for Sept. 1917, p. 73.
[66] J. A. Mitchell, letter to the authors, 30 Sept. 1965.

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the workshops establishment" was put under arrest.[67] His judgement was doubtless called upon at the time of the Armistice, in November 1918, when the authorities, anticipating difficulties during the demobilization process, detailed three divisions for duty at the ports and demobilization camps and circulated confidential warnings of the type: "Agitators and discontented men are not to be allowed to address assemblies of soldiers . . .".[68] Wroughton's handling of the great strike at Calais Base in January 1919, however, formed the high point in his career. The suppression of this, the largest mutiny which beset the B.E.F. in France, demonstrates how flexible G.H.Q. could be in the pursuit of its ends.

On Monday 27 January 1919, G.H.Q. was informed that thousands of British soldiers at Calais Base, staffing the huge ordnance depots and stores, had refused all duties; and that the strike was spreading to other units at the base.[69] By stopping work on military supplies, and by halting rail, road and sea communications from this great base, their actions threatened to paralyse a large section of the army. The strike was one of sympathy, and concerned the arrest, while delivering a "seditious" speech to an assembly of soldiers, of Private John Pantling, Royal Army Ordnance Corps. This was Pantling's second arrest within a period of days, and his fellow soldiers felt that he was being victimized for the part he had played in an organization which the troops had set up at the base; "it was not so", an officer complained, "as it was an independent action by Private Pantling".[70] In any case, the men refused duties, declined even discussion with their officers, until Pantling had been freed. Brigadier-General J. B. Wroughton took charge of the affair. He gave orders, by telephone, that Pantling be released, and then himself went down to

[67] The prisoners' strike is mentioned in P.R.O., WO 95/4018, Commandant, Calais Base, "War Diary", 15 Apr. 1918. The disturbances during the summer are covered in the same diary. Details of the strikes at the Tank Corps workshops, and at the ordnance workshops, Le Havre Base, are to be found in P.R.O., WO 95/59, Director of Ordnance Services, G.H.Q., "War Diary", 21-7 Dec. 1918.

[68] One of the divisions thus employed was the 59th (North Midland) Division, which in April 1916 had been transferred across Great Britain for use against the Irish nationalists in Dublin. Some instructions for dealing with "agitators" are to be found in P.R.O., WO 95/445, A. and Q.M.'s Branch, Fourth Army H.Q., "War Diary", Dec. 1918, App. C, Sect. III.

[69] Innumerable sources touch upon the Calais mutiny. A description of the events leading up to the strike is to be found in P.R.O., WO 95/3994, D[eputy] D[irector of] O[rdnance] S[ervices] (N[orth]), L[ines] of C[ommunication], "War Diary", 27-8 Jan. 1919; details of negotiations with the strikers, from the official point of view, are given in P.R.O., WO 95/60, D[irector of] O[rdnance] S[ervices], G.H.Q., "War Diary", 27-31 Jan. 1919. A. Killick, *Mutiny! The Story of the Calais Mutiny, 1918* (Brighton, n.d.), is an interesting account of the strike by a participant.

[70] P.R.O., WO 95/3994, D.D.O.S.(N.), L. of C., "War Diary", 28 Jan. 1919.

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Calais. Reaching the base on Tuesday, he found that "all work was stopped and the town picketed by strikers".[71] Whereas that morning thousands had been striking, Pantling's return to camp at noon broke up their solidarity. The ordnancemen decided to continue until other grievances had been settled, but that afternoon railway troops returned to work, and men of the Royal Army Service Corps began drifting back as well. Their return isolated the striking ordnance men. Against this intransigence, two tactics were now used. The first, obviously, was to continue with the methods of persuasion, and a senior officer arranged to meet the men next day.[72] A second tactic, less gentle than the first, was also put into effect. Shortly before 11.00 a.m. on Tuesday morning the staff of Fifth Army, B.E.F., had received orders to send one infantry brigade to Calais forthwith, for special duty. The brigade was to move with as many officers as possible, up to two hundred boxes of small arms ammunition, and each company was to carry with it three machine guns. Its duties? "To assist in quelling riots in that town".[73] 105th Infantry Brigade, 35th Division, approached Calais at 8.00 p.m. that day.

In the event, 105th Brigade could not be used against Private Pantling's friends. On Tuesday afternoon, five thousand infantrymen, due to return to their units at the front but detained in Calais when the railways stopped running, themselves decided on a strike and asked to be demobilized at once.[74] The addition of these front-line

[71] P.R.O., WO 95/60, D.O.S., G.H.Q., "War Diary", 27-8 Jan. 1919. The strike was spreading to Dunkirk Base, where practically all the service troops were threatening to down tools; and the women of the Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps were staying away from work.

[72] The officer concerned, Maj.-Gen. Sir Charles Mathew, K.C.M.G., C.B., D.S.O., found the job distasteful. After a fruitless meeting with the men, he returned to headquarters "convinced that the strike, which was pre-arranged and only precipitated by the arrest of the R.A.O.C. representative, had its origin in Bolshevism". Three days later he recorded his opinion that the strike had been inspired by far cleverer brains outside France. The men's grievances were without foundation, their demands unreasonable and "made with the object of showing the power of the organisers to enforce their will on their superior officers". "Incendiary" newspapers had in no small measure contributed to the spirit of unrest. P.R.O., WO 95/60, D.O.S., G.H.Q., "War Diary", 29 Jan. and 1 Feb. 1919.

[73] P.R.O., WO 95/522, General Staff, Fifth Army, "War Diary", 28 Jan. 1919; WO 95/2486, H.Q., 105th Infantry Brigade, "War Diary", 28 Jan. 1919.

[74] An incident in Berlin some weeks earlier provides an interesting parallel to these events. "The stopping of railway transportation led, on November 8, to a demonstration of furloughed soldiers who were thus detained in Berlin". These soldiers then played an important part in the German Revolution. R. H. Lutz, "The German Revolution, 1918-1919", in *History, Economics, and Political Science* (Stanford Univ. Pubs., University Ser., i, 1926), p. 48.

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soldiers greatly complicated the authorities' position. The suppression of such a force was beyond the province of Wroughton's experience and rank, and could not be entrusted to a solitary brigade. A full general, with reinforcements hastily brought up, now took responsibility for subduing the infantry on strike, while Wroughton, deprived of military support, had to deal as best he could with the striking ordnance men. On Thursday 30th January the mutiny of the five thousand was suppressed, while Wroughton parleyed with the ordnance men. After winning a number of concessions, these men agreed to end their strike.[75] The events of that day provide a scene without parallel in the history of the army: the spectacle of two sets of mutineers, each several thousand strong, gathered in the same town, the one talking freely with the generals, the other surrounded and put down. In all, these disturbances, which at their height had seemed quite overwhelming, were skilfully suppressed: suppressed, that is, without repercussion damaging to the government at home or helpful to the revolutionary movement in Great Britain as a whole.

* * * *

It may be useful, by way of a conclusion, to describe the limitations of the source material offered by the military archives in assessing the policy of G.H.Q. towards indiscipline during the years 1917 to 1919. Practically nothing is to be found in the diaries of the Adjutant General, while the published materials, whether from private or from governmental sources, prove thoroughly misleading. In assessing how, at Etaples, a particular balance was struck between conciliation and repression, and how, in the ensuing months, precautions were taken to prevent disturbance breaking out again, we have to resort to the records of the units actually involved, augmented wherever possible by the recollections of men now some sixty years older than they were when these events took place. Where the records of the units concerned are inadequate or bad, we remain ignorant not only of official policy, but also of details of the discontent itself. The records of Le Havre Base, B.E.F., are by no means as comprehensive as those kept at Etaples or Calais; they give, accordingly, no account of incidents there on the night of 9-10 December 1918, when men of the Royal Artillery burnt down several depots in a riot which, in its

[75] The negotiations are set out in P.R.O., WO 95/60, D.O.S., G.H.Q., "War Diary", and WO 95/71, Director of Transport, G.H.Q., "War Diary", 30 Jan. 1919. The suppression of the other mutiny is fully described in P.R.O., WO 95/2470, General Staff, 35th Division, "War Diary", 30 Jan. 1919 and Appendices.

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destructiveness, outweighed anything which Etaples Base had seen.[76] Again, some units excluded from their records mention of any disaffection. The diaries, for instance, of the 13th Battalion, Yorkshire Regiment, passing that winter in North Russia, record only the uneventful discharge of ordinary duties; they tell nothing of the firm hand with which senior officers dealt with an attempt to organize a strike — nothing, that is, of two sergeants sentenced to be shot, of White Russian machine guns brought up to cow the disaffected.[77]

Whatever the incidents now forgotten or concealed, a careful inspection of the military records does offer a number of rewards. It not only illuminates, at a local level, the problems which the authorities faced in suppressing disaffection, it also refutes some misconceptions which have arisen in this field. The infliction of the death penalty on deserters, mutineers and cowards is a subject which has attracted a variety of writings; but, given official secrecy over names, charges and court martial proceedings, hearsay and recollection have had more or less free rein.[78] Only overall statistics have ever been released; salient among which is the fact that 335 men were executed for serious military offences abroad during the years 1914-19.[79] This figure, with its inference that the law's due process was invariably observed, has reconciled some to the workings of military justice, while others, rash enough to suggest that a larger figure was probably involved, have been compelled by threat of legal

[76] Interview with A. Charman, 26 Jan. 1966. Mr. Charman, a regular soldier, was serving with the Royal Horse Artillery at Le Havre Base. His account of the conflagration is confirmed by the diaries of the Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps, whose personnel were charged with cooking in the depots. On the morning of 10 December 1918 the Deputy Controller, Havre Area, Q.M.A.A.C., visited the cookhouses which had survived the fire, and found her cooks to be "showing an excellent example to the Troops. Special praise was given to Worker Sargent for her cool behaviour when a number of men entered her office". The diary entry speaks of several camps being burned down the night before. P.R.O., WO 95/85, Area Controller, Havre, Q.M.A.A.C., "War Diary", 10 Dec. 1918.

[77] Edmund Ironside, *Archangel 1918-1919* (London, 1953), p. 113; V. V. Marushevsky, "God na Sever' " [A Year in the North], in A. A. Von Lampe (ed.), *Beloye Delo, Letopis' Beloy Bor'by* [The White Cause, A Chronicle of the White Struggle] (Berlin, 1927), pp. 43-4. Ironside and Marushevsky were the general officers concerned.

[78] A recent example of work in this vein is William Moore, *The Thin Yellow Line* (London, 1974). There is much material in the P.R.O. relevant to his theme; this he has failed to examine.

[79] *General Annual Reports on the British Army . . . for the Period from 1st October, 1913, to 30th September, 1919*, Parliamentary Papers, 1921 (Cmd. 1193), xx, p. 557.

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action to recant.[80] The death of No. 240120 Corporal William Wood, 4th Battalion, Gordon Highlanders, on 9 September 1917, of wounds received that afternoon at the hands of the military police; the death of a Canadian soldier on 16 December 1917, caught in the firing as men serving with the Labour Corps were shot; the death of scores, even hundreds (we do not know the number) of labour troops shot during strikes or attempted breakings out of camp; the death, only a few days after his release from jail, of No. S/8428 Private John Pantling (from influenza, whose fatal consequences, thousands of his fellow-soldiers thought, were directly linked with his physical condition after periods in custody): the fate of these men, and of an unknown number of others, demonstrates the misleading nature of the figures officially released.[81] These men died without benefit of trial and find no place, therefore, in any return which the War Office has chosen to supply.

Their deaths place in perspective the rumour which spread in late 1917, to the effect that the "ringleaders" of the Etaples mutiny were shot.[82] These men may have escaped this fate, but only if the military authorities had feared that news of their death, circulating through the army, might have had further and unfortunate effect. Official policy in such matters was flexible indeed. Men responsible for organizing disaffection on a far larger scale the following winter, in both France and the Middle East, escaped without punishment at all, so threatening were the number and temper of the troops who backed them up. Equally, unfortunates who ran away from the trenches, if only for a day, were very often shot.[83] And official

[80] Unaware that on occasion junior officers shot men by the dozen, Charles Carrington declares: "It would have been inconceivable for a British general to execute . . . mutineers by his own summary authority". Carrington, *Soldier from the Wars Returning*, p. 169. Sylvia Pankhurst's newspaper *Workers Dreadnought* published, in 1920, some startling figures on the incidence of indiscipline in the army, but was compelled, under threat of prosecution, to withdraw them. Both Carrington and Pankhurst neglect the distinction between execution, which implies judicial process, and summary shooting, which does not.

[81] The relatives and friends of Corporal Wood were informed, via his death certificate, that he had "Died of Wounds (Accidental)". Private Pantling died on 13 February 1919, aged 32. Little is known about this remarkable man, who played so large a part in organizing the service troops at Calais Base and whose last days were spent in negotiations with a team of senior officers sent down from G.H.Q.

[82] Interview with J. A. Mitchell.

[83] The following is a typical example, and concerns a lad of nineteen:
"No. 4071 Pte J. Bennett, 1st Hampshire Regiment was tried by Field General Court-Martial on the following charge:

(cont. on p. 112)

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flexibility extended to questions of publishing, or concealing, the news of executions. When it was felt that publicity would support good discipline, the circumstances of executions were published throughout the B.E.F.[84] In those cases, on the other hand, where an adverse reaction might have been expected, G.H.Q. resorted to denial. "No armed force has ever been used in France to compel the Chinese labourers to do their work or to remain in any locality", explained a memorandum drawn up by the Director of Labour, G.H.Q., in September 1917 for Haig to sign and release to the British press after criticisms had been voiced about the ill-treatment of these men.[85]

Douglas Gill
Gloden Dallas

(note 83 cont.)

'When on Active Service, misbehaving before the enemy in such a manner as to show cowardice.'

The accused, from motives of cowardice, left the trenches during a gas attack.

The sentence of the Court was 'To suffer death by being shot.' The sentence was duly carried out at 5.40 a.m. on 28th August 1916."

P.R.O., WO 95/26, Adjutant General, G.H.Q., "General Routine Order 1771", Sept. 1916.

[84] C. E. W. Bean writes of "the constant reading out, on parade, by order throughout the British Army, of reports of the infliction of the death penalty upon British soldiers". Bean, *The Australian Imperial Force in France during the Main German Offensive, 1918* (*op. cit.*, v), p. 31.

[85] P.R.O., WO 95/83, Director of Labour, G.H.Q., "War Diary", Sept. 1917, Annexure G2.

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