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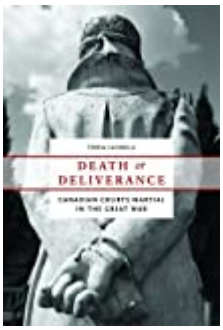

Teresa Iacobelli. *Death or Deliverance: Canadian Courts Martial in the Great War.* Vancouver: University Of British Columbia Press, 2014. 192 pp. $35.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7748-2568-9.

Reviewed by Rachel Beard

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air War College)

Death or Deliverance: Canadian Courts Martial in the Great War is a thorough and exhaustive examination of the myriad factors that influenced the outcome of courts martial punishment during the First World War. By focusing on the crimes of desertion and cowardice, Teresa Iacobelli has asked the question of âdeath or deliveranceâ with an eye towards the capricious nature of justice in the early twentieth century. By scoping her research to pure military crimes, she was able to form a unique perspective that contradicts popular lore. Iacobelli has produced an in-depth analysis that surpasses much of what has come before on the subject of early military justice and is a must-read for any student of military justice and its history.

In Iacobelliâs introduction, she establishes her premise. She asks the question, what was the norm for convictions of the crimes of cowardice and desertion? The âconventional viewâ is that military discipline was harsh, with no latitude given to offenders. Why then were so many of the death sentences commuted? What factors led to the ultimate decision of death or deliverance? And what does this tell us about Canadian military justice? Her methodology is to analyze what factors led to those particular crimes and which factors led to the ultimate punishment. Her work follows three major themes in order to address these questions. In the first part of the work, Iacobelli provides a description of military law and its contrast to the prevailing civilian philosophy of the time, specifically with respect to the attitudes toward the death penalty in the early twentieth century. She provides ample evidence that contrary to popular opinion, military justice was not as harsh and unforgiving as popular culture would have us believe. Her final theme addresses the social memory of the time and the subsequent campaigns for pardons starting in the 1980s and culminating in 2006 with the Pardon's Bill. Her intent is to ensure that we view military justice in the context of the time and not judge it by todayâs standards and she is ultimately very successful and delivers a volume that precisely captures that intent.

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