

CHARGE OF WEARING V.C. RIBAND.

CAMPBELL ACQUITTED.

At a Dorchester camp yesterday the trial by Court-martial of Driver William Richard Campbell, Australian Imperial Forces, was continued. He was charged with wearing the riband of the V.C. and the chevrons of a sergeant, to which he was not entitled. The offences were alleged to have been committed at Wareham and at York, at which city the accused man was given a Mansion House reception by the Lord Mayor.

Campbell was found "Not Guilty" on both charges and he was acquitted. The verdict was received with cheering in Court. Outside the Court hundreds of Anzacs assembled, and they chaired Campbell and gave him a hearty reception.

Formal evidence was given on behalf of the War Office to the effect that the Victoria Cross had not been awarded to Campbell, and that no letter had been sent to him stating that it had been awarded.

In his evidence, Campbell said that on August 7 he was attached to a trench mortar battery, and he went with a party to the front line trenches. Early on August 8 his sergeant was killed, and he was instructed by the officer in charge to take the sergeant's place, and was given the stripes of the dead man. On the 10th, after his officer had been killed, the Inniskillings were attacked on his left by Germans, who took possession of their trench mortars. He then took the dead officer's revolver, rallied his men, and drove the Germans off, recovering the mortars. There were 15 or 16 Germans and seven of his men. He killed a few of the enemy with the revolver and was wounded in four places. After some time at a military hospital at York he rejoined his camp in the South of England, and there, on November 23, he received a letter from the Australian Headquarters, London, enclosing a V.C. riband and giving him authority to wear it. The letter was addressed "Sergeant Campbell, V.C." It was signed General Johnstone. While at York at Christmas he fell ill, and, though he was given a medical certificate, he was locked up as an absentee and brought to camp under escort. At the camp, however, the charge of being an absentee was at once dismissed.

Private Leake, V.C., gave evidence on behalf of Campbell. He first saw the accused man wearing the riband towards the end of December, when they were both entertained by the Mayoress of Wareham. The witness did not ask Campbell how he had won the decoration, as he objected to being questioned himself about his own deed. A letter from Major Brown, A.P.M., was produced, stating that it seemed that Campbell had been the victim of a practical joke.