

# PASSPORT TO HELL

BY ROBIN HYDE

## WHAT'S GONE BEFORE

Invercargill's stormy petrel, John Douglas Stark, half-Indian, half-Spanish, went from his brief school career to a job on a New Zealand coastal vessel. It lasted but a short time, however, and he walked off the ship at Lyttelton and started for home. He got work in the Wyndham Valley, cutting flax, but a fight with the camp boss sent him onto the roads again. In Christchurch he was arrested and eventually thrown into goal in Invercargill. Here his insubordination brought him all sorts of penalties, but finally he was free again. One night, standing on a street corner, a policeman asked him what he was doing. "Looking for a job," muttered Starkie . . . .

### NOW READ ON

"Don't be funny, Stark." The grip on his shoulder tightened. "I'll give you a job, my lad—two jobs. You can have a job at a ha'penny a day blocking the swamps, or a job at a dollar a day fighting for your King. What's it to be?"

Something inside the mind of the boy who could have two jobs disliked the idea of being run by the police. He had served his time in tomb and mud-hole and irons. He twisted in the policeman's grip.

"I'll give you a job," he shouted, "pulling yourself out of this!" Then he took to his heels. The policeman, taken by surprise, floundered on his back in the middle of Briscoe's window-display, splintered glass framing fat body and outraged face. In a minute a whistle shrieked, feet peited. The running boy was out of sight.

That night Starkie slept in an extremely wet and mouldy haystack down in Roach's Paddock, and found that the fascinating tramps who in his childhood had praised this form of sleeping accommodation were liars like the rest. The hay knotted toughly in his ribs, smelt of mildew, and was full of tiny red-creeping parasites which bit. For two days he spent his time dodging the public. He bought his food, sixpenn'orth at a time, warily over the counters of obscure

shops. Always the eyes of those who served him seemed hard and watchful. Always he listened for the sound of the whistle. He made a business of slinking through town on an elaborate, useless system of cross-streets, never proceeding straight in any direction. It was all purposeless, blind, and hopeless. He would be picked yet, and he knew it. But apart from the game of hare and hounds, he had nothing to do and nowhere to go.

It was on one of these elaborate games that the hare found himself outside the Drill Sheds. He had a feeling that they were on his heels. He edged down to the Zealandia Hall, noticed the flutter of the cotton Union Jack, and the straggling little queue of men in civilian clothes, fell in line with them. He was safe, camouflaged, doing what other men were doing without attracting the notice of the police. He was inside the hall, look-

He went back with the chit to the Zealandia Hall, passed fit for active service.

Captain Grey pored over the chit for a moment, then barked at his recruit.

"Ever been in goal, Stark?"

"Never, sir" said Starkie.

The hard face crinkled up in a sudden grin. "Very well, Starkie. You never were in goal. Well, there's a contingent leaving in about twenty days' time—you can join up with that . . ."

Twenty days, and every copper in Invercargill on his trail, ready to box him up until the War was over and done with. For the moment, utterly disheartened, he could only stammer thanks and slink back to the streets again. That night he curled up like a dog and slept in a corner behind the hall. The mere shadow of the arrogant little cotton flag was some

ghostly protection to him. In the morning he was inside the office again. For three days he waylaid Captain Grey, joining up with the queues whenever he could edge his way among them, camping behind the hall at nights. On the fourth day, down to his last shilling,

he buttonholed Captain Grey as that self-possessed officer strode towards his lair, and begged to be allowed a preview of the War. Captain Grey, who knew precisely as much about Starkie's past and present circumstances as Starkie and the police did themselves, screwed up his mouth, hesitated.

"There's no chance, Stark."

Starkie broke down. Precisely what he said he could never afterwards remember, but there was a good deal in it about lamp-posts, cops, the Dummy, and a broken window-pane with a police official framed in the middle of it.

Captain Grey looked neither hurt nor surprised. At the end of Starkie's tale, he said curtly, "A draft leaves for Trentham tomorrow. If anyone falls out sick, you can take his place. The train leaves at six a.m." He was gone, and Starkie looked after him as never yet had he

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## Southland Echoes to Marching Feet—and Sixteen-Year-Old Starkie Starts For The War

ing across a desk into the eyes of a clean-shaven man who snapped absent-mindedly as he asked a string of questions, but whose thin mouth had a good-humoured quirk at the corners.

"Ever been in goal?"

He jumped. But "No," he said stolidly.

The eyes of the Captain behind the desk stared with some amusement at his clothes, still bearing the creases of a year in the prison stores.

"Nationality? Age?"

Starkie gave the nationality right, but his age as twenty.

"Had any trouble at all?" drawled the Captain.

Starkie shook his head.

"Very well, Stark." The Captain bent his head, scribbled for a moment on a piece of paper. "Chit for Dr. Bevan, rooms in Speight Street. Hop it, and report here when he's done with you."

Dr. Bevan was easy. Hands that felt the stringy muscles in his lean body, shrewd eyes that stared at him.