

"PASSPORT TO HELL"

took to carve, propping it on a truss of straw on the tent floor. In the excitement of the moment he set his foot on it. Into the mud slid the dinner.

"Oh, God!" said Goliath resignedly "Come along down to the canteen."

On tea and little pork pies of a restrained size and parched interior they made their first meal in Trentham.

Getting to bed in the bell tents wasn't a picnic, unless you were one of the Lilliputians who could really fit the minute trusses of straw doled out by the camp authorities. In Tent Eight this was quite out of the question; Starkie, the lightest of the company, turning the scales at twelve stone.

While the lights still flared in the canteen, Fleshy McLeod tapped him on the shoulder, whispering, "C'mon." Ten Eight's mess orderly crept out of the canteen at the heels of his lord and master, and the two made their beds up and turned in while the rest were still putting away pies and tea.

In an hour their tent-mates returned and there was an argument, the upshot of which was that the whole of Starkie's bedding was fairly enough distributed among the others. In the next tent they were audibly drawing lots for their bed-straw, but the results didn't matter, for Starkie creeping on his stomach to the rear of the tent, cut a slit in the canvas and gently dragged out the straw. All was peace in Tent Eight until after reveille, when it was discovered by the outraged inhabitants of Tent Seven that straw had been dropped between the two tents. In the morning there was a court of inquiry, and Captain Dombey decided that the amount of straw in Tent Eight was against reason and the nature—never very lavish—of the storeman.

Starkie looked round to see which of his mates would spill the beans, but the seven giants remained mute as fitches of bacon, their eyes twinkling in large red faces. Tent Eight got three days' C.B. all round during which none of his mates chose to re-

proach their mess orderly. After that Starkie decided that he was going to like the War.

Latrine duty was an undignified aspect of camp life, and affected him more painfully than the incessant barkings of "Left, right, left, right! . . . About turn—r-r-r! . . . Quick march! . . . Double march! . . . Forrrrm r'ours! . . . Forrrrm two-deep!" with which a drill sergeant—whose yell was all on the one hysterical note—haunted their hours in the drill ground. The primitive sanitary accommodation of the camp consisted of rows of kerosene tins, neatly set, with as much privacy as could be arranged, between the white rows of tents. Latrine duty entailed a slow and painful "nightmare" progress among these tins after dusk. Upon the indignities of this Starkie pondered. As his tent-mates had prophesied, the lowest and most unapproachable occupations always fell upon him, and he rather suspected that his colouring had something to do with it. The Maoris had marched off in a Pioneer Corps of their own, and Starkie was the only black sheep in the battalion. Nevertheless, he had a mind for higher things than latrine duty, and worried a great deal as to the possible dodging of it. By and by he found a solution, and things were much easier for the next two nights in succession. But his record-breaking performances thereafter did not escape the eye of authority, and he scented the beginning of the end when Sergeant Taine stood affectionately beside a latrine tin for a full half hour, pouring in water and staring with a hypnotised yet incredulous expression as the water miraculously drained away.

Presently Starkie was summoned to Captain Dombey's tent. Here, in serried phalanxes, were sixty-five latrine tins, the bottom of each punctured with four holes. Starkie had employed an unusually large nail, and the effect was ruinous. He was unable satisfactorily to explain this, and got six days' C.B., which was, however, little more uncomfortable than the normal routine of camp duty at Trentham. Exception was also taken to

the words "Rummies' Retreat", which appeared in enormous letters of nugget-black upon Tent Eight: for this a further three days' C.B. was bestowed upon him, and he learned more about drill than some soldiers are perplexed with in a lifetime.

Trainloads of girls came up to the Hutt towns from Wellington every night. In camp the tea bugie sounded at five; the mess orderlies went up for tea, meat, and vegetables; the dishes were washed and returned to the cook-house, and after that, barring C.B., the bright young night was all your own to play with. The boys used to walk up to the little Upper Hutt towns, where in the big white river-bank houses liquor was to be had; and their clumsy military boots shuffled in the pre-war dances—the old waltz, the schottische, the Maxina, the Valeta, and for the really spry fellow, square dances, the Lancers, and the d'Alberts—always called the Dee Alberts. These were danced with the figures all wrong, and a jolly bloke with a concertina shouting, "Take your partners for the next set! Swing! . . ." Swing they did, the little feet of the girls lifting off the floor, their bodies, with a soldier's arm passed under each armpit, flying out dangerously, almost horizontal; their breasts panting in the old-fashioned evening gowns of crepe de Chine and China silk; their faces scarlet.

When they were through with dancing, there was the riverband outside. The Hutt is only a little river, though its sudden deep pot-holes and odd currents have drowned many a stout swimmer. It creeps, ten yards wide, under silver birch trees and stiff russet-leaved osiers, the kind whose slim, reddish boughs are used in basket-making. Here and there the yellow bank caves in, making niches where, among the spangled wild-flowers and tall grass, boy and girl could curl up, arm around each other's waist, tousled poppy-head dropping on khaki shoulder.

The men in camp should, according to regulations, have been between the ages of eighteen and forty-five.

(To be continued Next Week).

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