



NEW ZEALAND ROLL

By 467356

How long have we been waiting for that ship? Six days? Seven? Eight? We've almost lost count. But it doesn't matter. We're among the lucky ones. Some of the boys have been waiting three weeks.

There's still no news of a ship to take us home. Rumours in plenty, of course. Going to-morrow, next week; no more ships for a month. A fellow has just come in from Base and he says . . . We know these stories for what they are; we've heard them so many times. And yet we consider each one again in detail. After all, there is the faintest hope that they might have some foundation in fact, if only we could find the fact.

This waiting wouldn't be so bad if it weren't for the mossies, and this accursed alternating rain and heat, and this drab alien landscape. At least, that's what we tell ourselves. For hours the sun has been beating down from a cloudless sky and the earth throbs like an inflamed spot in your flesh. And we're so tired of all that. The pleasant things just now are the things that don't belong in this place, perhaps a sight of snow, fields in the plains, sheep, and houses in rows and squares.

That's what we tell ourselves. The truth is partly, of course, that we're tired of picking up sticks on the football-ground and messing about in similar odd jobs. The climate isn't really so bad and we can put up with the mossies. But right now we know we're going home and we want to get cracking.

"You know," says Blue from the folds of his mossie-net, "the first thing I'm going to do when I *do* get there is have a hot bath. I'm going to lie in it for hours and hours. Just soak. It's eight months now since I had a hot bath."

"Yeah?" says Shorty. "Well, that can be second for me. First on my list is a good feed of steak and eggs. Or egg, as I believe it is these days."

"You fellows remind me of the bloke in the story," Charlie says. "You know, the fellow who was going home from the last war——"

But he has no time to tell us that one. From the head of the lines comes the voice of the R.S.M., raised to its highest pitch:

"New Zealand roll, fall out!"

And that is one order the R.S.M. doesn't have to give twice.

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In our tent, eight mossie-nets are flipped back together and eight men tumble out into the brilliant burning light. Men are hurrying down the line in dozens. They are hurrying on crutches, with walking-sticks, with their arms in plaster and slings. One has a bandage round his head. Some, like the fellows in our tent, show no signs of the injury or illness that is taking them home. They have skin-diseases. Or perhaps they've had more fever than they can stand.

"All right, men," the R.S.M. says. "You're leaving for home at half past