



tents, a nonchalant hour after time, there was usually another dispute to be settled. Were we to carry our own valises or were they to be disposed of in the baggage truck? In the absence of the platoon commander, we *knew* they were supposed to be in the baggage truck. What was a baggage truck for? So hastily converting idea into action, we dumped our gear on the spot. Only when it was all stowed away (rifles underneath) did the platoon commander catch up with our dexterity. "Get that stuff out of there. What do you think this stunt is, a school picnic?" Reluctant, injured, rebellious, we saddled ourselves once more. Total war, that's what it was—total war.

Trucks in those days were civilian vehicles which had been commandeered. You might travel in anything from an ice-cream van to a sheep-wagon. We climbed in and sat humped together, rifles between our knees, circulating our "battle bowlers" on our heads to stop the itch, settling into our web like horses into harness. Then came the first jolt, first of many, as we ground our way in low gear across the camp to the open road.

Unfortunately, manoeuvres did not always commence with this sybaritic

ease. They were more likely to be ushered in by a protracted route march of some fifteen miles to the setting of the drama. This was the case in the manoeuvres at Waiouru. We knew every pebble in the desert road, every stopping place for burning feet, every creek at which to gulp water, because we had kicked them, stopped at them, and gulped at them on the way to or from, a manoeuvre.

I remember those stunts at Waiouru well. Who doesn't? Most of us from the North Island were immured for some time among the frigid tussocks which clotted the skirts of Ruapehu. And of the many aspects of Waiouru life which terrorized the embryo soldier, the most detested was the exercise of manoeuvres. No place on earth could flash such kaleidoscopic changes over its face as the Desert Plain. From scalding sand to icy waste was a matter of moments. Distance was illimitable. You could march in any direction of the compass for fifty miles. We did.

I remember one manoeuvre. I was a runner to an officer who, being an old fox at the game, reckoned that the most comfortable manoeuvre was that spent in captivity back at the enemy base (which, oddly enough, was always the officers' mess). To further his ideas, he always displayed great willingness to be captured—often risking his manoeuvre life in the process. Bombs, machine guns, hand grenades meant nothing to Mr. X, provided that he saw capture at the end of the ordeal. This day it took half an hour (which must have raised his average), and I was dragged off with him—but not to the officers' mess. Because he tricked me, bamboozled me properly. As we were led back to the rear lines, we passed a running Ariel. Our guards were thinking of their tea, not of us. Quoth Mr. X: "Grab that motor-bike and hop it back to our own lines. Go on—they (the guards) won't notice."

An order's an order. I obeyed—as injured as a man whose beer has been drunk by some one else behind his back. I knew that even if I did convert the bike (and I had ridden only once before), I would have had the devil's own job in