

IT'S NOT QUITE DONE Old man!



EMILY POST tells you not to eat peas with your knife—so did your mother, no doubt—but it is doubtful if even this well-known American would have a book of etiquette to cover the solecisms that a soldier returning to New Zealand might at times commit. Books on etiquette often make amusing reading, but there is no intention to be amusing in this article. It is meant to help the soldier who is lucky enough to be going home to get settled down quickly and easily.

Let's take a day in a returned serviceman's life. It is the first day home. Corporal Simkins turns over in his hotel bed and looks at the time. Eight o'clock! He thinks of mungaporridge, bacon, beans, and grease—as you were—beans, grease and bacon, but there has been no "Come and get it or I'll throw it out". He tosses back the bed-clothes. Sheets! He stares incredulously. At last the army had recognised his ability. He had his pip at last. Yes, and the batman had left a cup of tea alongside his bed. It was cold now—he'd have to speak to him about it later. And look at the room—must be Shepheard's or the Imperiale, he thought.

He glanced across the room and saw his battledress. Two stripes as before, but alongside it were two kit-bags, and it all came back to him. He was in New Zealand, and this wasn't the Rome Club or Danieli's. It was just the ——— Hotel, Wellington. Yes, really Wellington. And the same old Wellington, too. Well, even if there was a gale blowing outside, he had better get dressed.

Simkins had always been a clean, soldier. As sanitary corporal in his unit, he had always cherished a great ambition—to become an officer; even one pip would do. And to that end he had spent much time in polishing his boots and in agreeing with everything anyone higher up the ladder had said. But, he sighed as he thought of it, he had not succeeded. Perhaps, he had shown too much intelligence and perhaps his own job was the more important one after all.

Sub-consciously he went on with his preparations. He had looked in vain for a shovel, but had succeeded in hiding his old razor blades and rubbish behind the mirror. He went over to the bed and started folding up the bedding. The mattress would not sit very well, but he had flattened it into a neat roll by much sitting and bouncing. It was a pity he had kicked over the table lamp, but they were not bringing much at present anyway. He didn't really need all those blankets on his bed as well as the eiderdown—one could easily go into his second kit-bag. At last the room was more or less tidy—bedding rolled as he had done it on the troopship, spare boots, toilet gear, and other articles neatly arranged on the spring mattress. The next item was breakfast.

The corporal's step was jaunty as he walked along the corridor. He had had a moment's twinge of anxiety when he closed the door of his room.