

Passport to Hell

Robyn Hyde

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Passport to Hell is the story of James Douglas Stark—"Starkie"—and his war. Journalist and novelist Robin Hyde came across Starkie while reporting in Mt Eden Gaol in the 1930s and immediately knew she had to write his "queer true terrible story." Born in Southland and finding himself in early trouble with the law, the young Starkie tricked his way into a draft in 1914 by means of a subterfuge involving whisky and tea. He had a subsequent checkered career in Egypt, Gallipoli, Armentières, the Somme, and Ypres. Hyde portrays a man carousing in the brothels of Cairo and the estaminets of Flanders; looting a dead man's money-belt and filching beer from the Tommies; attempting to shoot a sergeant through a lavatory door in a haze of absinthe, yet carrying his wounded captain back across No Man's Land; a man recommended for the V.C. and honored for his bravery—but also subject to nine court martials. It is a portrait of a singular individual who has also been described as the quintessential New Zealand soldier.



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