

The Last Parade

Banjo Paterson

With never a sound of trumpet,

With never a flag displayed,

The last of the old campaigners

Lined up for the last parade.

Weary they were and battered,

Shoeless, and knocked about;

From under their ragged forelocks

Their hungry eyes looked out.

And they watched as the old commander

Read out, to the cheering men,

The Nation's thanks and the orders

To carry them home again.

And the last of the old campaigners,

Sinewy, lean, and spare—

He spoke for his hungry comrades:

‘Have we not done our share?

‘Starving and tired and thirsty
We limped on the blazing plain;
And after a long night’s picket
You saddled us up again.

‘We froze on the wind-swept kopjes
When the frost lay snowy-white.
Never a halt in the daytime,
Never a rest at night!

‘We knew when the rifles rattled
From the hillside bare and brown,
And over our weary shoulders
We felt warm blood run down,

‘As we turned for the stretching gallop,
Crushed to the earth with weight;
But we carried our riders through it—
Carried them p’raps too late.

‘Steel! We were steel to stand it—

We that have lasted through,

We that are old campaigners

Pitiful, poor, and few.

‘Over the sea you brought us,

Over the leagues of foam:

Now we have served you fairly

Will you not take us home?

‘Home to the Hunter River,

To the flats where the lucerne grows;

Home where the Murrumbidgee

Runs white with the melted snows.

‘This is a small thing surely!

Will not you give command

That the last of the old campaigners

Go back to their native land?’

They looked at the grim commander,

But never a sign he made.

‘Dismiss!’ and the old campaigners

Moved off from their last parade.

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