

Only 19

John Williamson

Mum and Dad and Danny saw the passing out parade at Puckapunyal

It was a long march from cadets
The sixth battalion was next to tour, it was me who drew the card
We did Canungra, Shoalwater before we left

And Townsville lined the footpaths as we marched down to the quay
This clipping from the paper shows me young and strong and clean
And there's me with me slouch hat, my SLR and greens
God help me - I was only nineteen

From Vung Tau riding Chinooks to the dust at Nui Dat
I'd been in and out of choppers now for months
We made our tents a home, V.B. and pinups on the lockers
And an Asian orange sunset through the scrub

And can you tell me, doctor, why I can't get to sleep?
And night time's just a jungle dark and a barking M.16?
And what's this rash that comes and goes, can you tell me what it means?
God help me - I was only nineteen

A four week operation, any step could be your last one on two legs
It was a war within yourself
But you wouldn't let your mates down 'til they had you dusted off
So you closed your eyes and you thought about somethin' else

Then someone yelled out "Contact", and the bloke behind me swore
We hooked in there for hours, then a God almighty roar
Frankie kicked the mine the day that mankind kicked the moon
God help me - he was goin' home in June

I can still see Frankie, drinkin' tinnies in the Grand Hotel
On a thirty-six hour rec. leave in Vung Tau
And I can still hear Frankie, lyin' screamin' in the jungle
'Til the morphine came and killed the bloody row

And the Anzac legends didn't mention mud and blood and tears
And the stories that my father told me never seemed quite real
And I caught some pieces in my back that I didn't even feel
God help me, I was only 19

And can you tell me Doctor why I still can't get to sleep?
And night time's just a jungle dark and a barking M16
And what's this rash that comes and goes can you tell me what it means?
God help me, I was only 19.