

The Band Played Waltzing Matilda

June Tabor

Now when I was a young man I carried me pack
And I lived the free life of the rover.
From the Murray's green basin to the dusty outback,
Well, I waltzed my Matilda all over.
Then in 1915, my country said, "Son,
It's time you stop ramblin', there's work to be done."
So they gave me a tin hat, and they gave me a gun,
And they marched me away to the war.

And the band played "Waltzing Matilda,"
As the ship pulled away from the quay,
And amidst all the cheers, the flag waving, and tears,
We sailed off for Gallipoli.

And how well I remember that terrible day,
How our blood stained the sand and the water;
And of how in that hell that they call Suvla Bay
We were butchered like lambs at the slaughter.
Johnny Turk, he was waitin', he primed himself well;
He showered us with bullets, and he rained us with
Shell --
And in five minutes flat, he'd blown us all to hell,
Nearly blew us right back to Australia.

But the band played "Waltzing Matilda,"
When we stopped to bury our slain,
Well, we buried ours, and the Turks buried theirs,
Then we started all over again.

And those that were left, well, we tried to survive
In that mad world of blood, death and fire.
And for ten weary weeks I kept myself alive
Though around me the corpses piled higher.
Then a big Turkish shell knocked me arse over head,
And when I woke up in me hospital bed
And saw what it had done, well, I wished I was dead --
Never knew there was worse things than dying.

For I'll go no more "Waltzing Matilda,"
All around the green bush far and free --
To hump tents and pegs, a man needs both legs,
No more "Waltzing Matilda" for me.

So they gathered the crippled, the wounded, the maimed,
And they shipped us back home to Australia.
The armless, the legless, the blind, the insane,
Those proud wounded heroes of Suvla.
And as our ship sailed into Circular Quay,
I looked at the place where me legs used to be,
And thanked Christ there was nobody waiting for me,
To grieve, to mourn and to pity.

But the band played "Waltzing Matilda,"
As they carried us down the gangway,
But nobody cheered, they just stood and stared,
Then they turned all their faces away.

And so now every April, I sit on my porch
And I watch the parade pass before me.
And I see my old comrades, how proudly they march,
Reviving old dreams of past glory,
And the old men march slowly, all bones stiff and sore,
They're tired old heroes from a forgotten war
And the young people ask "What are they marching for?"
And I ask meself the same question.

But the band plays "Waltzing Matilda,"
And the old men still answer the call,
But as year follows year, more old men disappear
Someday, no one will march there at all.

Waltzing Matilda, waltzing Matilda.
Who'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me?
And their ghosts may be heard as they march by the
Billabong,
Who'll come a-Waltzing Matilda with me?