

I Was Only 19

Julia Stone

Mum and Dad and Denny saw the passing-out parade at Puckapunyal
It was a long march from cadets.
The sixth battalion was the next to tour, and 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 us young and strong and clean.
And there's me in my slouch hat with 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.
But we made our tents a home, VB and pinups on the lockers
And an Agent Orange sunset through the scrub.

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 nineteen.

A four week operation when each step could mean 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 thought about something else.

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

I can still see Frankie, drinking tinnies in the Grand Hotel
On a thirty-six hour rec leave in Vung Tau
And I can still hear Frankie, lying screaming 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.
I caught some pieces in my back that I didn't even feel
God help me, I was only nineteen.

And can you tell me, doctor, why I still can't get to sleep?

And why the Channel Seven chopper chills me to my feet?
And what's this rash that comes and goes, can you tell me what
it means?
God help me, I was only nineteen.