

# I Was Only Nineteen

## John Schumann (Redgum)

A C G D A G A

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 me slouch hat with me 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 asian 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 M  
sixteen?

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 god all mighty  
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  
isleep?

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

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