

John Williamson

"Only 19"

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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 a youngon', 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 d

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