

John McDermott, And The Band Played Waltzing

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

And the band played Waltzing Matilda
As the ships pulled away from the quay
And amid all the tears, flag waving and cheers
We sailed off to Galipolli

And how I remember that terrible day
How our blood stained the sand and the water
And how in that hell that they called Suvla Bay
We were butchered like lambs to the slaughter.

Johnnie Turk was ready, oh he primed himself well
He rained us with bullets and he showered us with shell
And in five minutes flat we were all blown to hell
nearly blew us all back home to Australia.

But the band played Waltzing Matilda
as we stuck to bury our slain
We burned ours and the Turks buried theirs
and we started all over again

Those who were living just tried to survive
In a mad world of blood death and fire
And for ten weary weeks, I kept myself alive
While around me the corpses piled higher

Then a big Turkish shell knocked me arse over head
And when I awoke in my hospital bed
And saw what it had done and I wished I was dead
Never knew there were worse things than dying
For no more I'll go Waltzing Matilda
All round the green bush far and near
For to hump tent and pegs a man needs both legs
No more Waltzing Matilda for me.

They collected 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 pulled in to Circular Key
And I looked at the place where my legs used to be
I thanked Christ there was no one there waiting for me
To grieve and to mourn and to Pity

And the band played Waltzing Matilda
as they carried us down the gangway
But nobody cheered, they just stood there and stared
And turned all their faces away

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
Renewing their dreams of past glory

I see the old men all tired, stiff and sore
The weary old heroes of a forgotten war

And the young people ask "What are they marching for?"
And I ask myself the same question

And the band played Waltzing Matilda
And the old men still answer the call
But year after year, the numbers get fewer
Some day none 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.