

John McDermott

The Tragedy of War

Song Lyrics

(Performed by John McDermott)

The Green Fields of France

Well how do you do, young Willie McBride, do you
mind if I sit here down by your graveside. And rest for a
while 'neath the warm summer sun. I've been walking all day and
I'm nearly done. I see by your gravestone you were
only 19 when you joined the great fallen in 1916.
I hope you died well and I hope you died clean.
Or young Willie McBride, was it slow and unseen.

Chorus:

Did they beat the drum slowly, did they play the fife lowly,
did they sound the death-march as they lowered you down.
Did the band play The Last Post and chorus.
Did the pipes play The Flowers of The Forest.

Did you leave a wife or a sweetheart behind
In some faithful heart is your memory enshrined
Although you died back in 1916
In that faithful heart are you forever 19
Or are you a stranger without even a name
Enclosed then forever behind the glass frame
In a old photograph, torn, battered and stained
And faded to yellow in a brown leather frame.

Chorus:

Did they beat the drum slowly, did they play the fife lowly,
did they sound the death-march as they lowered you down.
Did the band play The Last Post and chorus.
Did the pipes play The Flowers of The Forest.

The sun now it shines on the green fields of France
There's a warm summer breeze, it makes the red poppies dance.
And look how the sun shines from under the clouds
There's no gas, no barbed wire, there's no guns firing now
But here in this graveyard it's still no-man's-land
The countless white crosses stand mute in the sand
To man's blind indifference to his fellow man
To a whole generation that were butchered and damned.

Chorus:

Did they beat the drum slowly, did they play the fife lowly,
did they sound the death-march as they lowered you down.
Did the band play The Last Post and chorus.
Did the pipes play The Flowers of The Forest.

I am Willie McBride I can't help but wonder why
Did all those who lie here know why did they die
And did they believe when they answered the call
Did they really believe that this war would end war
For the sorrows, the suffering, the glory, the pain
The killing and dying was all done in vain
For young Willie McBride it all happened again
And again, and again, and again, and again.

(Repeat of Chorus)

And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda

When I was a young man, I carried my pack, and I lived the free life of the rover.
From the murray's green basin to the dusty outback, I waltzed my Matilda all over.
Then in 1915, my country said: "Son, it's time to stop ramblin' there's work to be done."
So 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 our ship pulled away from the quay
And amid all the tears, flag-waving and cheers, we sailed off to Gallipoli.

Oh, it's well I remember that terrible day, when our blood stained the sand and the water
And how, in that hell, they called Suvla-bay, we were butchered like lambs at the slaughter.
Johnny Turk he was ready, he trained himself well
He rained us with bullets and showered us with shells
And in five minutes flat, we were all blown to hell, yeah they blew us back home to Australia.

And the band played Waltzing Matilda, as we stopped to bury our slain
We burned ours and the Turks buried theirs, then it started all over again.

All those that 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 me hospital bed
And saw, what it had done, I wished I was dead, I never knew there were worse things than
dying.

And I'll go no more Waltzing Matilda, or around the green bush far and near
For hunting tent pegs, a man need both legs, no more Waltzing Matilda for me

They collected the wounded, the crippled, the lame, and they shipped us back home to Australia
The armless, the legless, the blind, the insane, those proud wounded heroes of Sulva
And when the ship pulled in, to Circular Key
I looked at the place where my legs used to be

I thanked Christ, there is no one there waiting for me, to grieve and to mourn and to pity

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

And now, ev'ry April, I sit on me porch, and I watch the parade pass before me
I see me old comrades, how proudly they march, renewing their dreams of past glory
I see the old men, all tired, stiff and sore
Those wearied 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 grow few'r, someday no one will march there at all

Waltzing Matilda, Waltzing Matilda, who'll come a'waltzing Matilda with me?
Now their ghosts may be heard, as they pass by the Billabong

So who'll come a Waltzing Matilda with me?

Danny Boy

Oh Danny boy, the pipes, the pipes are calling
From glen to glen and down the mountain side
The summer's gone and all the roses dying
'Tis you, 'tis you must go and I must bide

But come ye back when summer's in the meadow
Or when the valley's hushed and white with snow
And I'll be here in sunshine or in shadow
Oh Danny boy, oh Danny boy I love you so

But if ye come and all the flowers are dying
And I am dead, as dead I well may be
Ye'll come here and find the place where I am lying
And kneel and say an "Ave" there for me

And I shall hear tho' soft you tread above me
And then my grave will richer, sweeter be
For you will bend and tell me that you love me
And I shall rest in peace until you come to me

Mother Machree

There's a spot in me heart which no colleen may own
There's a depth in me soul never sounded or known
There's a place in my mem'ry, my life that you fill
No other can take it, no one ever will
Sure I love the dear silver that shines in your hair,
And the brow that's all furrowed, and wrinkled with care

I kiss the dear fingers so toil-worn for me
Oh, God bless you and keep you, Mother Machree!
Ev'ry sorrow or care in the dear days gone by
Was made bright by the light of the smile in your eye.
Like a candle that's set in a window at night
Your fond love has cheered me, and guided me right.
Sure I love the dear silver that shines in your hair,
And the brow that's all furrowed, and wrinkled with care.
I kiss the dear fingers so toil-worn for me
Oh, God bless you and keep you, Mother Machree!

The Faded Coat of Blue

My brave lad sleeps in his faded coat of blue
In a lonely grave unknown lies the heart that beats so true.

He sang faint and hungry among the famished brave
And they layed him sad and lonely within his nameless grave.

No more the bugle calls the weary one.
Rest noble spirit in thy grave unknown.

I'll find you and know you among the good and true.
When a robe of white is given for the faded coat of blue.

(Instrumental)

He cried, "Give me water" and just a little crumb
And my mother she would bless you through all the years to come.

Oh tell my sweet sister so gentle, good and true
That I'll meet her up in heaven in my faded coat of blue.

No more the bugle calls the weary one.
Rest noble spirit in thy grave unknown.

I'll find you and know you among the good and true.
When a robe of white is given for a faded coat blue.

(Instrumental)

Long long years have vanished and though he comes no more
Yet my heart will startling beat with each footfall at my door.

I gaze o'er hill where he waved a last adieu
But no gallant lad I see in his faded coat of blue.

No more the bugle calls the weary one.
Rest noble spirit in thy grave unknown.

I'll find you and know you among the good and true.
When a robe of white is given for a faded coat blue.

Christmas in the Trenches

Oh, my name is Francis Tolliver, I come from Liverpool.
Two years ago the war was waiting for me after school.
From Belgium and to Flanders, Germany to here
I fought for King and country I love dear.
'Twas Christmas in the trenches, and the frost so bitter hung,
The frozen fields of France were still, no Christmas song was sung
Our families back in England were toasting us that day
Their brave and glorious lads so far away.

I was lying with my messmate on the cold and rocky ground
When across the lines of battle came a most peculiar sound
Says I, "Now listen up, me boys!" each soldier strained to hear
As one young German voice sang out so clear.
"He's singing bloody well, you know!" my partner says to me
Soon, one by one, each German voice joined in in harmony
The cannons rested silent, and the gas clouds rolled no more
As Christmas brought us respite from the war

– Instrumental break –

As soon as they were finished and a reverent pause was spent
"God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen" struck up some lads from Kent
The next they sang was "Stille Nacht." "Tis 'Silent Night'," says I
And in two tongues one song filled up that sky
"There's someone coming toward us now!" the front line sentry cried
All sights were fixed on one lone figure trudging from their side
His truce flag, like a Christmas star, shown on that plain so bright
As he, bravely, trudged unarmed into the night
Then one by one on either side walked into No Man's Land
With neither gun nor bayonet we met there hand to hand,
We shared some secret brandy and we wished each other well
And in a flare-lit football game we gave 'em hell
We traded chocolates, cigarettes, and photographs from home
These sons and fathers far away from families of their own
Tom Sanders played his squeezebox and they had a violin
This curious and unlikely band of men

– Instrumental break –

Soon daylight stole upon us and France was France once more
With sad farewells we each began to settle back to war
But the question haunted every heart that lived that wonderous night
"Whose family have I fixed within my sights?"
'Twas Christmas in the trenches and the frost, so bitter hung
The frozen fields of France were warmed as songs of peace were sung

For the walls they'd kept between us to exact the work of war
Had been crumbled and were gone forevermore

– Instrumental break –

My name is Francis Tolliver, in Liverpool I dwell
Each Christmas come since World War I, I've learned its lessons well
For the ones who call the shots won't be among the dead and lame
And on each end of the rifle we're the same

When You and I Were Young, Maggie

I wandered today to the hill, Maggie
To watch the scene below
The creek and the rusty old mill, Maggie
Where we sat in the long, long ago.
The green grove is gone from the hill, Maggie
Where first the daisies sprung
The creaking old mill is still, Maggie
Since you and I were young.
A city so silent and lone, Maggie
Where the young and the gay and the best
In polished white mansion of stone, Maggie
Have each found a place of rest
Is built where the birds used to play, Maggie
And join in the songs that were sung
For we sang just as gay as they, Maggie
When you and I were young.
They say I am feeble with age, Maggie
My steps are less sprightly than then
My face is a well written page, Maggie
But time alone was the pen.
They say we are aged and grey, Maggie
As spray by the white breakers flung
But to me you're as fair as you were, Maggie
When you and I were young.
And now we are aged and grey, Maggie
The trials of life nearly done
Let us sing of the days that are gone, Maggie
When you and I were young.

The Minstrel Boy

The Minstrel Boy to the war is gone
In the ranks of death you will find him
His father's sword he has girded on
And his wild harp slung behind him

Chorus:

"Land of Song!" said the warrior bard
"Tho' all the world betrays thee
One sword, at least, thy rights shall guard
One faithful harp shall praise thee!"

The Minstrel fell! But the foeman's chain
Could not bring his proud soul under
The harp he lov'd ne'er spoke again
For he tore its chords asunder
And said "No chains shall sully thee
Thou soul of love and brav'ry!
Thy songs were made for the pure and free,
They shall never sound in slavery!"

Chorus:

"Land of Song!" said the warrior bard
"Tho' all the world betrays thee
One sword, at least, thy rights shall guard
One faithful harp shall praise thee!"

When I Grow Too Old to Dream

We have been gay going our way
Life has been beautiful, we have been young
After you've gone, life will go on
Like an old song that we've sung

When I grow too old to dream
I'll have you to remember
When I grow too old to dream
Your love will live in my heart

So kill me my sweet
And so let us part
And when I grow too old to dream
That kiss will live in my heart

After you've gone life will go on
Time will be tenderly melting our tears
Yet will I find you in my mind
Beckoning over the years

When I grow too old to dream
I'll have you to remember
When I grow too old to dream
Your love will live in my heart

So kiss me my sweet
And so let us part

And when I grow too old to dream
That kiss will live in my heart

– Instrumental break –

So kiss me my sweet
And so let us part
And when I grow too old to dream
That kiss will live in my heart

And when I grow too old to dream
That kiss will live in my heart.

The Rose of Tralee

The pale moon was rising above the green mountain,
The sun was declining beneath the blue sea;
When I strayed with my love to the pure crystal fountain,
That stands in the beautiful Vale of Tralee.
She was lovely and fair as the rose of the summer,
Yet 'twas not her beauty alone that won me;
Oh no, 'twas the truth in her eyes ever dawning,
That made me love Mary, the Rose of Tralee.
The cool shades of evening their mantle were spreading
And Mary all smiling sat listening to me;
The moon through the valley her pale rays were shining
When I won the heart of the Rose of Tralee.
She was lovely and fair as the rose of the summer,
Yet 'twas not her beauty alone that won me;
Oh no, 'twas the truth in her eyes ever dawning,
That made me love Mary, the Rose of Tralee.

On the far fields of India, mid war's bloody thunder,
Her voice was a solace and comfort to me,
But the cold hand of death has now torn us asunder
I'm lonely tonight for my Rose of Tralee.
She was lovely and fair as the rose of the summer,
Yet 'twas not her beauty alone that won me;
Oh no, 'twas the truth in her eyes ever dawning,
That made me love Mary, the Rose of Tralee.

Auld Lang Syne

Should auld acquaintance be forgot
And never brought to mind
Should auld acquaintance be forgot
And days of auld lang syne
And there's a hand, my trusty friend
And gie's a hand to thine
We'll take a cup of kindness yet

For auld lang syne
For auld lang syne, my dear
For auld lang syne
We'll take a cup of kindness yet
For auld lang syne
Should auld acquaintance be forgot
And never brought to mind
Should auld acquaintance be forgot
And days of auld lang syne
For auld lang syne, my dear
For auld lang syne
Should auld acquaintance be forgot
And days of auld lang syne
For auld lang syne

Legacy

Old soldiers never die they say
They just fade away

And did you think that we'd forget you
And that your memory would soon fade
That the passing years would rob you
Of your place in history's page
Did you think we'd scorn your sacrifice
And find no honour in the debt
When your lives paid our freedom's price
How then could we forget

And that's their greatest Legacy
The freedom we hold yet
We never can repay them
And we never should forget

Did you think we'd take for granted
All your fought to keep alive
That the seed your courage planted
Would struggle to survive
When mothers, fathers, daughters, sons
Gave their blood and tears and sweat
To nourish a peace so dearly won
How then could we forget

And that's their greatest Legacy
The freedom we hold yet
We never can repay them
And we never should forget

There's an empty table here tonight
To honour comrades lost

To remind us all, that liberty's light
Cannot burn without a cost
So carve their names on granite walls
With sorrow, love and pride
But their greatest monument of all
Is this dear land for which they died

And that's their greatest Legacy
The freedom we hold yet
We never can repay them
And we never should forget

Long may old glory fly
O'er the land of the free
You gave of your best
Now old soldier rest
And pass the flag to me.