

STARING INTO BLACKNESS, WISHING FOR THE DAWN

By John Dusting

RAEME 106 Field Workshop – Nui Dat 1969-1970

Staring into blackness, wishing for the dawn.
The nothingness and boredom, the feelings of scorn.
The sadness, the loneliness
of a boy too far from home,
on a lonely mid-night picket, in a place that's so forlorn.

I think of how the marbles fell in nineteen sixty six.
Of how I lost the lottery that sent me to these sticks.
I wondered how a whole years balls
fitted in such a small, small, box.
And who had paid to be left out, if the lottery was fixed.

The medicals and selections of those poor hapless groups,
chosen from the many to become the conscript troops.
"Too young to vote! To young to fight!"
The protesters bitter cry.
Little difference to the old men in their crisp politician suits.

On first of May the communists marched the Melbourne streets,
but communists in other lands we were called up to defeat.
We caught the bus to join the ranks,
an army of conscripted youth.
The bus was then diverted to avoid the marching communist threat.

Ten weeks at Pukapunyal for the crime of being born!
Nine more months in virtual prison at the army's beck and call!
The freedom of other youths denied,
careers put on hold.
Political prisoners, for a far off war, and wishing for the dawn.

A few weeks sitting at South Head, waiting for the plane
that would take us overseas for yet another year of pain.
We found ourselves in Nui Dat,
the airstrip melting in the heat,
to the "365-and-awakey" ringing as a welcoming refrain.

“Another bloody year of this!” Each man clearly showed the score.
Laughing greetings made to fuel the pain; pain the greeters knew before.
Their tour was mostly behind them.
They would soon be getting out.
And we were here to fill the gaps, as they gladly slammed the door.

RAEME 106 Field Workshops, our home from home today,
in an old banana grove, the Vietnam owner’s driven away.
A tented roof inside a sandbag ring,
four beds, and a rough wood floor.
Three other guys who owned the place welcomed me to stay.

Communal showers, communal bog, communal dry canteen.
Communal sleeping quarters, communal dust and din.
And each three weeks for one full day,
a Vung Tau trip to would bring
drinks at the bars, a massage, and a swim to wash you clean.

The heat, damp mould, and creeping rats that ate away your clothes.
Bugs that kill with just one bite, and the mossy’s constant drone.
And standing in this stinking trench,
on a picket this dark night
thinking of it as luxury, compared with the front line jungle zones.

Those poor bastards out there somewhere, in some forward ambush post
waiting for an enemy dark, who was stalking them this night. The most
usual confrontation;
to be taken by surprise.
Yes, a row of razor wire at front of trench. A luxury to most.

Staring into blackness, wishing for the dawn.
The nothingness, the boredom, the feelings of scorn.
We were sacrificed for US trade,
to a war we couldn’t win,
for a country that despised us, wishing we would not return.

But we did.