

Folk & Traditional Song Lyrics

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The Trooper Cut Down in His Prime

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As I was a-walkin' down by the Royal Arsenal,
Early the morning though 'warm was the day,
When who should I see but one of my comrades,
All wrapped up in flannel, and cold as the clay.

CHORUS-

Then beat the drum slowly and play your fife slowly,
And sound the dead march as you carry me along;
And fire your bundooks* right over my coffin,
For I'm a young trooper cut down in my prime.

The bugles were playin'; his mates were a-prayin',
The chaplain was kneelin' down by his bed;
His poor head was achin', his poor heart was breakin',
This poor young trooper cut down in his prime.

(CHORUS)

Get six of my comrades to carry my coffin,
Six of my comrades to carry me on high;
And six young maidens to carry white roses,
So they won't smell me as they pass me by.

(CHORUS)

Outside of the barracks you will find two girls standin',
And one to the other she whispered and said:
"Here comes the young swaddy** Whose money we squandered,
Here comes the young trooper cut down in his prime."

(CHORUS)

On the cross by his grave you will find these words written:
"All you young troopers take warnin' by me;
Keep away from them flash-girls*** who walk in the city;
Flash-girls of the city have quite ruined me."

(CHORUS)

*-bundooks - from the Hindustani banduk, a rifle or musket

** -swaddy - English slang for soldier

***-flash-girls - street girls (probably prostitutes)

(Sung by Ewan MacColl) Time: 4:26

This British soldier's variant of the "Rake" ballad is reported as "...probably the oldest of British barrack-room favorites." Old army regulars claim that the song originated in the first expeditionary force sent to France during World War I, but it was likewise known among soldiers during the Boer War, as evidenced by MacColl's having heard an almost identical version sung by a ninety-year old actor, Norman Partridge, dating from the South African campaigns.

The trooper's death results from his consorting 'with "flash-girls", an oblique reference to death from venereal disease, though such "disordering" is not itself mentioned.

This recording may also be heard as part of an album of British soldier's songs, entitled Bless 'Em, All (Riverside RLP 12-642), sung by Ewan MacColl, and is reproduced here with the permission of Riverside Records. Guitar accompaniment for this number is supplied by Peggy Seeger.

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